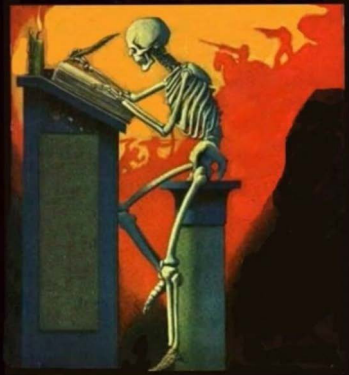


Wellman in
**Weird
Tales**



Manly Wade Wellman



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Weird Tales

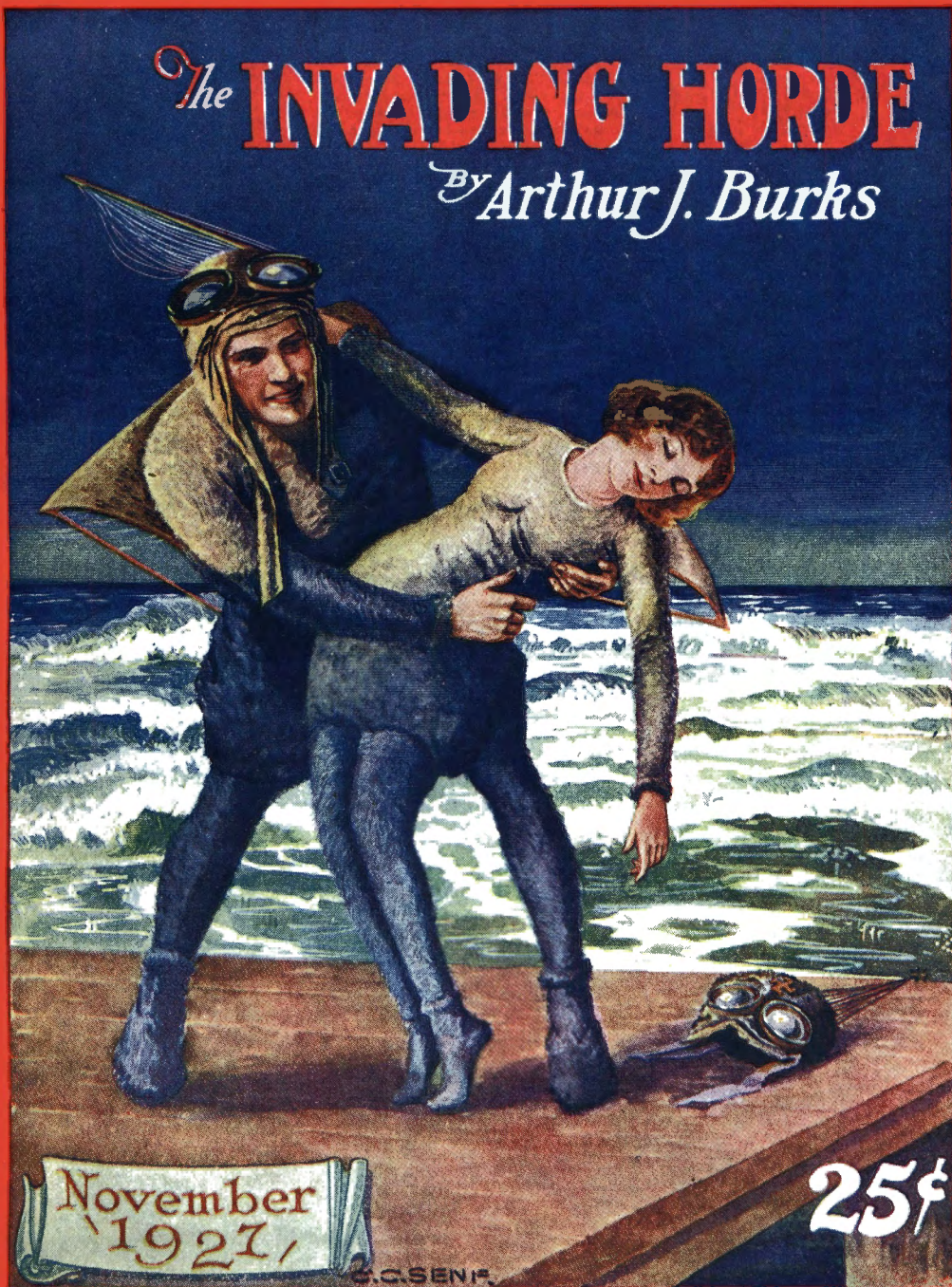
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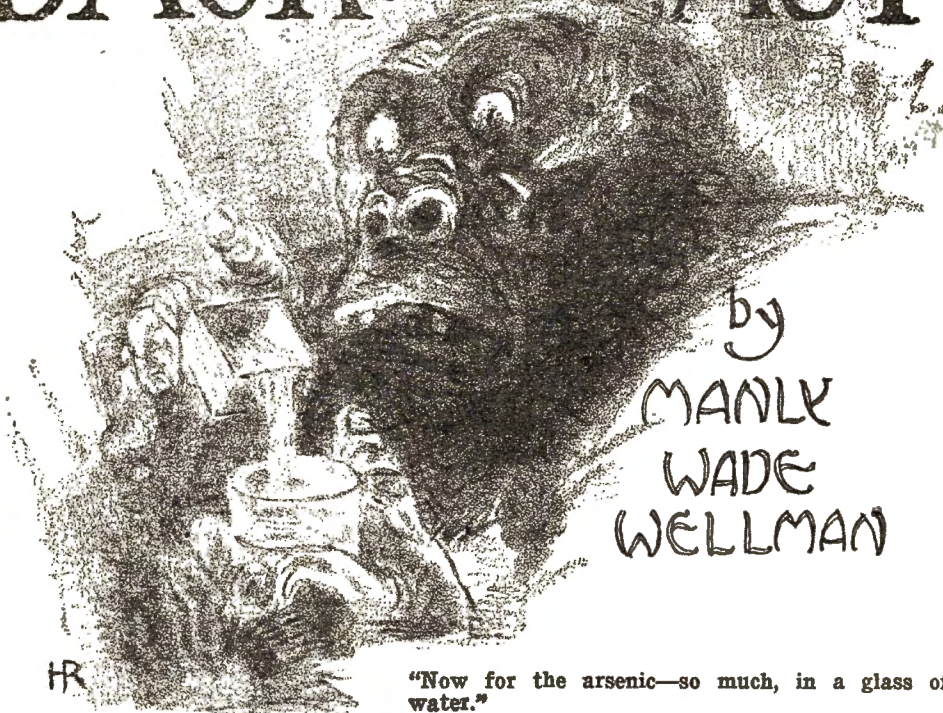
Vol. X, No. 5—25c

The INVADING HORDE *By* Arthur J. Burks



Edmond Hamilton — Will Smith — Henry S. Whitehead
G. G. Pendarves — Clare Winger Harris — and Others

BACK to the BEAST



"Now for the arsenic—so much, in a glass of water."

(From the *Smith City Mirror*, June 26, 1927)

POLICE are searching today for Dr. J. E. Lawlor, well-known physician and scientist, following a report from his secretary, James Brock, that he had disappeared from his home at 2100 Van Ness Avenue.

According to Brock, Dr. Lawlor locked himself into his private laboratory twelve days ago, ordering his servants not to disturb him, and to send food down by means of a dumb-waiter. As he had followed this plan several times before while working on experiments, Brock complied with his request. The time set was ten days and when there had been no response from the laboratory during the two

days following the elapse of this period, Brock feared some accident and, with the help of Georges Dmitri, Dr. Lawlor's cook, and Emil Bonner, his chauffeur, he forced the door this morning and found that the doctor was gone.

A weird angle is added to the incident by the dead body of a large ape which Brock found in a corner of the disordered laboratory. Although Dr. Lawlor was known to be interested in natural history and to have conducted several experiments with animals recently, Brock stated that he was sure the ape was not in the laboratory when it was closed twelve days ago. The table was covered with papers, which have been turned over to the police.

Brock, Dmitri and Bonner are held for questioning by Chief of Police John Walton.

Dr. Lawlor has no immediate family. A brother, Stanley Lawlor, of Topeka, Kansas, has been notified.

(From the Smith City Mirror, June 28, 1927)

ATTEMPTS to determine the species of the ape found dead in the laboratory of Dr. J. E. Lawlor, who disappeared last Saturday, were unsuccessful when Professor F. W. Baylor, head of the natural science department of the state university, said today that he had never seen such a creature before.

"There are eight kinds of anthropoid apes known to science," said Professor Baylor, "but this ape belongs to none of them. It has some of the characteristics of several, but resembles no single kind greatly. It is either a freak or of a species unknown until now."

Professor Baylor has ordered the animal embalmed and intends to send it to fellow-students of natural history in Chicago.

(From the Smith City Mirror, June 29, 1927)

JAMES BROCK, private secretary of Dr. J. E. Lawlor, 2100 Van Ness Avenue, was placed under arrest today to face charges of kidnaping and possibly murder of his employer last Saturday.

The arrest took place following the reading of papers purporting to be a journal of an experiment performed by the doctor, which Brock turned over to the police upon his employer's disappearance. Brock had been held for questioning, but was given his liberty Saturday.

The contents of the journal were not made public, but Chief John Walton described them as "preposterous and unbelievable, a forgery by

Brock to cover a very evident crime."

(Extracts from the papers given to police by James Brock as the journal of Dr. James Everett Lawlor)

JUNE 15—All is in readiness for my experiment—the final step in my great work that will afford scientists a true glimpse of how man appeared in the dim past. The narrow persons who refuse to believe in evolution will be forced to see the truth, for we will confront them, not with theories, but with proofs.

I have material now that would fill a great book—notes telling how I first discovered the combination of elements that induces deterioration and of my experiments with it, first on the lowest forms of life, then on more complex animals, with surprising and enlightening results. Years have been consumed in this study, but soon they will be paid for when I reveal what I have learned.

The elements for the two serums, products of nearly a lifetime of labor and observation, are at hand. One serum is the deteriorator, which when properly mingled and administered will make vital changes in the organs and tissues of an animal, changes which finally result in giving it the appearance of its ancestors untold ages ago. This change can be arrested by the administration of the counter-agent, which will restore the transformed creature to its former condition.

I do not suppose that any person less determined or less scientific in mind than I would dare perform this experiment upon himself; but after all, it is as safe as such a thing can be. I have studied its effects and powers too much and too long to go wrong now, and I know that I shall not be mentally incapable of handling it. The change is physiological, not psychological. Foretelling the

course of the whole process is a mere matter of rationalization.

As I plan it, I will let the deteriorator work in my blood for five days, then the counter-agent for five days, to make sure that the effects of the experiment are completely dissipated. Thus I expect to see in my mirror what my ancestors were like five thousand centuries ago, and then return to the body and semblance of Dr. Lawlor, all within two weeks at the least.

I have locked my door for ten days. Brock, a sound, sensible fellow who obeys my orders without questioning, will see to it that I am undisturbed. And after this private experiment, I shall present my findings to my fellow-scientists as the proof of their theories. Who can say that my name shall not be numbered with those of the great evolutionists?

June 16—For twenty-four hours I have had the serum in my blood. With what care I compounded it and injected it into the vein of my arm, you may well imagine. The effects were noticeable at once. My blood flowed faster and for a few moments I felt strangely light-headed, as if I had been drinking. This latter feeling passed away and I perspired freely, but felt no unpleasant sensations. Throughout the day I have taken notes on the progress of the experiment, and tonight my mirror shows me that it is a success.

The change in my appearance has not been so great as I expected, but it is very evident. I am florid and ruddy where I have generally been pale. I am far more robust and all over my body my hair has grown out, especially on the breast and shoulders and outsides of the arms—a strange condition for me, always smooth-skinned and of late years partly bald. I never felt better physically in my life, and I look, not the fine-drawn and slender scientist, but a full-bodied, really splendid savage.

In excess of well-being and in joy at the certain fulfilment of my expectations, I danced and leaped up and down this evening. Then, a little ashamed of myself, I sat down to write.

June 17—The effects of the serum are more pronounced today. Where yesterday I was but a primitive man, still decidedly human, I am today a man with a pronounced bestial look. My forehead has receded, my jaw is heavy, with sharp-pointed teeth. The change works in me every moment; I can feel it in my flesh and bones. Among other things, I am positively shaggy. The hair makes my clothes a discomfort and I have left them completely off.

I am never weary of watching my body as it changes almost before my very eyes. It is especially interesting to see how springy and flexible my joints have become, and how my feet have a tendency to turn their palms inward. This is because of the great toe, which is beginning to stand out from the others like a thumb; excellent proof that our ancestors were tree-dwellers and could get a grip with their feet.

June 18—When I awoke on my cot this morning, my first glance was toward the mirror. It was unable to recognize myself, unable to recognize even the thing I had been last night. In the broad, coarse face, with flat nose, splay nostrils, little beady eyes under beetling brows, wide mouth and brutal jaws, in the hairy, hulking body, there was no reminder of what had once been Dr. Lawlor. Some scholars would be frightened at the speed and effectiveness with which the serum has worked, but I can think of nothing save the triumph to science.

I am stooped considerably and stand unsteadily on my legs; not that they are not strong, but the tendency of my feet to turn inward has increased, so that I walk for the most

part on the outer edges. Their prehensile powers are developed, too, and they can pick up objects quite easily.

It is also interesting to note that my mental processes have not changed one whit—I can think as clearly and as deeply as ever. As I predicted, the serum does not effect the brain tissues; or, if it does, it does not keep them from functioning properly.

I have been hungry all day. The food Brock sent to me was not sufficient, especially as regards meat, and I must send up a note with the empty dishes for him to increase the amount.

June 19—This part of the experiment will stop tomorrow, for I shall then mix and administer the counter-agent.

Tonight I see myself to be an eery creature, half beast, half man. I am hard put to it to walk without supporting myself on the table and the backs of the chairs. So must our ancestors have looked when they swung down from the trees to achieve their first adventures on the ground and to conquer the world.

These five days, what with the many notes I have taken, will provide a fitting climax for the scientific book that I contemplate. How it will astound the world! What honors and distinctions may descend upon me! Fame is mine, certainly; fortune, if I wish it, may follow.

So good-night and good-bye, my primitive self yonder in the mirror. Tomorrow I shall commence the journey back to the appearance of Dr. Lawlor, that I may immortalize you in all your fascinating grotesqueness.

JUNE 20—How could I—oh, how could I not provide against this? With all the machinery of my experimentation evidently flawless, I must forget a single item—an item maddeningly simple, maddeningly ob-

vious, and yet a thing that has proved my undoing.

Let me remain sane for a moment and marshal the incidents as they occurred. There is not much to tell. This morning I went to my shelf of chemicals for the ingredients to compound into the counteracting serum. My hands, which of course had become clumsy and primitive, seemed to have trouble in picking up the little vials, but this did not worry me as I began the combining of my materials. Two of them I mixed in a graduated glass and then reached for a pipette to administer the third.

But my unsteady manipulation did not allow the proper proportion to flow in. I released a drop too much, and though there was a corresponding effervescence, I could see that the mixture was a failure. I poured it out and tried again, with the same result. With growing uneasiness I made a third attempt, and again my clumsy hands failed me.

Too late, I realized that the mingling of the elements in the proper proportions and manner had been a task that required all the delicacy of a skilled chemist. My hands, no longer the deft, steady hands of Dr. Lawlor, were those of a sub-human creature, and as such not equal to the feat!

Horrible, horrible! I moaned aloud when I realized what had happened and what would follow. Without the counter-agent I could not neutralize, or even halt, the progress of the deteriorator. Down I must go, back along the road up which the human race has struggled for untold centuries!

Again and again I desperately tried to mix the dose, until I had used up all my materials. Once or twice I thought that I had approximated the proper mingling, but when I injected it, there was no effect.

I sit here tonight, a rung farther toward the beast from whence we

sprang, instead of on the road back toward man. Like one lowered into a well, I see above me a circle of light growing smaller and dimmer as I descend into darkness and horror! What shall I do?

[From this point forward, the journal is written in an almost unintelligible scrawl.]

June 24—For three days I have not written. I have not slept and have eaten only when the pangs of hunger roused me from my half-trance of misery. Horror has closed over my head like water.

At first I searched frantically for more materials for the counter-agent, literally wrecking my laboratory, but to no avail. I had used it all in trying to mix the saving dose three days ago.

Today was to have been the last day of my experiment. Perhaps the servants will force the lock if I do not come out. And then?

I could never make them understand. I have no more power of speech than any other beast, for a beast I have surely become. I can not bear to look in the mirror, for I see only a dark, hairy form, hunched over the table, a pencil clutched in its paw. And that is I, James Lawlor! What wonder that I border on the edge of insanity?

Let whoever reads these words take warning from my plight. Do not meddle with the scheme of things as

nature has planned—delve not into her mysterious past. I have done that, and it was my complete and dreadful undoing. If it had not come in this way it would have come in another, I do not doubt for a moment.

June 25—Morning. I have not budged from the chair where I sat to write last evening. I heard Brock's voice outside the door, asking me if I was coming out. I dared not make a sound in reply, and he went away.

Is existence bearable in such a condition? Even now, the sliding back into lower and lower form continues. It will not be long before I am no longer even the ape-thing I appear. Perhaps the serum will carry me back through the ages until I am the slimy sea-crawler from which all life had its beginning. Oh, God! . . .

And as if in answer to that name, comes the memory of what still remains in a drawer of my table. Arsenic—not an easy death, but a quick one. So shall I die, for if ever a creature was justified in taking its own life, that creature is myself.

I will leave this journal as an account of what has happened, and as a warning to others. The formulas for my serums and all that pertains to them I will destroy. Never shall another scientist meet with my fate if I can order it otherwise. There, the papers are flaming in the grate. Now for the arsenic—so much, in a glass of water—farewell!

[Here the journal ends.]



OCTOBER, 1934

WEIRD TALES

Printed in
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Vol. 24, No. 4—25c



OCT.
25c

Weird Tales

THE
BLACK GOD'S KISS
the weirdest story
ever told

By C. L. MOORE

also
H. BEDFORD-JONES
and others



At the Bend of the Trail

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

A brief story of Africa and a weird vegetable monstrosity that fought two white explorers in the jungle

THEY stood at the bend of the trail, young Bruce Armstrong and white-haired Hubert Whaley, conversing while their black bearers raised their tent and built a cooking-fire. The sun was low on the African horizon and they whiled away the minutes before supper by conversation.

"As I was saying," Whaley told his young friend, "the natives invest every unusual object—rock, hill or what-not—with a supernatural personality and give it a wide berth. Look at this sharp curve in the trail. For years they've been dodging out to one side, just to avoid that root."

He pointed to a strange growth in the lush grass. It was long and crooked, lying in the shape of a letter S. If straight it might have been ten feet long, and it tapered from the size of a man's ankle at the point where it sprouted from the ground to a whiplash tip. It might have been the root of a tree, but there was no stem within yards to which it might attach.

"Rum thing. Looks as if a tree must be growing upside down," commented Armstrong. "Branches in the ground, root in the air, what? A chap could write books and books about uncatalogued plants in these parts. And you say the boys won't touch it?"

"Not one of them," replied Whaley. "Can't say that I blame them. It looks uncanny enough."

"What utter rot!" cried the younger man. "Come now, Whaley, do you mean

to say you give a minute's serious thought to their superstitions?"

"I mean to say that Africa's full of strange beings and doings," was Whaley's sober response. "When you've been here as long as I have——"

"I'm turning missionary this moment," cut in Armstrong. "I don't begrudge the blacks their ideas, but when a good friend and Englishman gets a touch of their religion I have to do something about it.—Hi, you Johnnies!" he cried to the bearers on the other side of the curved trail. "Tumble over here. Tell 'em, Whaley, I don't speak their lingo yet."

At Whaley's call a score of plum-colored men gathered, eyeing the whites with respectful interest.

"Look here, you chaps," said Armstrong. "What's all this about roots and spirits and such like? It's a lot of foolishness, you know.—Pass that on to 'em, Whaley, will you?"

When Whaley had translated, the headman replied that their tribal beliefs had been taught them by wise old men, who must have known the truth.

"Rot!" cried Armstrong when Whaley had rendered this into English. "Rot, I say, and I'll prove it. You're afraid to touch this root, are you?" He stepped close and set his boot-heel on the growth. "Well, then, suppose I show you that it's perfectly harmless."

A cry of alarm went up from the bearers—a cry echoed by Whaley.

"Look out, Armstrong! Look out, man, it's moving!"

The free tip of the root was swaying to and fro, like the head of a blindworm. Even as Armstrong stared in chilled amazement it writhed up from the ground and curled back toward his foot. With a startled exclamation he jumped away. The root-tip sank quickly down and lay motionless again.

Whaley and Armstrong looked at each other, at the root, and at the retreating bearers.

"I call it odd," said Armstrong after a moment, in a voice that quivered ever so slightly. "Something to tell about back home, what?"

"Best leave it alone, old man," counseled Whaley. "Suppose we see what's for supper."

THEY ate in the gathering gloom, ate silently. In silence they smoked their pipes. The usual singing and laughing of the bearers were subdued also. Whaley noticed Armstrong's nervous fidgeting, wondered what to say, and said nothing. A dry rustle in the grass attracted their attention.

"What's that?" demanded Armstrong sharply. "A snake?"

"Let's have a look-see," suggested Whaley, taking the lantern from the tent-pole. "Dashed unpleasant things, snakes. Bring along the gun—it might be a big one."

But they found no snake, and the bearers, called to help look, said that there were few snakes in this part of the country. Finally the two whites returned to the fire to resume their smoking. Armstrong muttered, twitched and finally broke the silence.

"It's all nonsense, and I say it once for all."

"What's all nonsense? What do you mean?" asked Whaley, though he knew well enough.

"This beastly root business. It gets on my nerves. I can't forget it. When it writhed under my foot—ugh! My flesh crept."

"Don't try to worry it out," Whaley said. "You'll only go batty trying to explain it."

At that Armstrong jumped up, reached into the tool-box just inside the tent and grabbed a hand-ax. With this he strode away toward the trail.

"Don't be a silly ass, man," called Whaley, following him. "What are you going to do?"

"Going to cut that root out," flung back Armstrong. "I've bothered about it quite enough. I shan't sleep tonight, not while the thing's there."

"It's just on your nerves, Armstrong," said Whaley. "I tell you, it's nothing. Just a funny-looking plant that rustled when you kicked it.—Hm! What's this?"

They had come into the bend of the trail. The last rays of light showed them that there was no root there, no growing thing larger than a blade of grass, not even a hole to show where it might have been. The ax drooped in Armstrong's hand. The two stared at each other as the night rode down.

"Wood's scarce hereabouts," said Whaley in a low voice. "Perhaps the boys cut it up and used it for a fire."

Armstrong shook his head. "No, Whaley. You said yourself, and so did they, that it was a thing not to be touched."

THEY walked back to their camp. The brightness of the lantern shed a little comfort on them as they again sat in silence. "Bed?" suggested Whaley at last, and they entered the tent. "Now, forget——"

"You're a topping fellow, Whaley, but I don't need babying," said Arm-

strong, sitting on his cot to pull off his boots.

"Of course not. Go to sleep now, there's a good chap, and don't dream of roots."

"Dash it all, who's going to dream about 'em?" said Armstrong as they put out the light and lay down.

Silence yet again, and after a minute or two Whaley could hear Armstrong's deep, regular breathing. The young man was asleep, probably had dismissed the queer adventure of the evening as a trifle. But Whaley, as he himself had said, had lived too long in Africa to banish all strange things so lightly from his mind. He pondered long before he, too, dozed off.

He woke suddenly with a wild shriek splitting his ears, the shriek of a man in mortal terror. He sprang out of bed, shaking the sleep from his eyes. Moonbeams came through the half-opened flaps, showing Armstrong struggling on the ground between the cots. He was fighting somebody or something—Whaley could not see his antagonist. The older man dropped to his knees, reaching out to help. His hands fell on a quivering band that circled Armstrong's chest. He recoiled from it with a cry. He had touched wood, wood that moved and lived like flesh!

"Whaley—the thing—it's choking me!" gasped Armstrong in a rattling voice. "It has a spirit—it's after revenge——"

He writhed along the ground and half out of the tent, then collapsed. In the light from the moon Whaley saw a sight that stirred his white hair. A writhing, cable-like thing was grappling with Armstrong. It had wound twice around his body and arms, and the two loose ends were lashing to and fro like flails.

Whaley flung himself forward again.

One of the flailing ends fell on his head, knocking him back into the tent. He went sprawling, half stunned and almost out of the fight. His hand fell into the open tool-box. A single grab found the handle of the ax that Armstrong had picked up earlier in the evening. The feel of the weapon seemed to restore Whaley's strength. Once more he charged into the battle.

Armstrong barely quivered now. Only the nameless attacker moved. Whaley put out his hand and clutched the larger coil that crushed his friend's chest. Sinking his nails into the coarse, splintery skin that coated it, he dragged it a little free of its hold and struck with the ax. The blade sank deeply into the tough tissue. He wrenched the ax free, and the moonlight fell upon the gash, as white as fresh-cut pine.

The floundering coils churned with new, hostile energy, loosening their hold on the fallen Armstrong. Whaley dragged at them, and they leaped and twisted in his hand like a flooded fire-hose. The smaller end glided across the ground and whipped around Whaley's ankle, climbing it in a spiral. Another loop snapped on his wrist like a half-hitch, almost breaking it. He grunted at the crushing agony, but with a supreme effort, drew a length almost taut between arm and leg. With all the strength of his right arm he drove the ax. He felt the steel edge bite deep. The grip on wrist and ankle relaxed and he freed himself with a sudden struggle. The two sun-dered halves of the thing flopped and twisted on the ground, like the pieces of a gigantic severed worm.

Whaley's mind whirled and he yearned to let himself drop and swoon, but he lifted the ax and struck again and yet again. His chest panted, his brow streamed sweat, but he chopped

and chopped until only pulsating fragments lay around him. He dashed them all into the half-dead fire, which blazed quickly over this new food.

Then for the first time he realized that the native bearers were gathered, watching in frozen horror. He looked at them, then at the silent form of his partner. He

knelt and passed his hands over the still body.

"Broken arm—three cracked ribs," he said aloud. "Not bad for an evil spirit." He called to the headman. "Build up the fire, heat water. Bring a bottle of brandy. You other boys, carry him into the tent. Lord, what a country!"



Weird Tales

MAY

The Unique Magazine



THE DEVIL'S DOUBLE

a powerful tale of the ghastly Blue Death

By PAUL ERNST

25c

ARTHUR J. BURKS

EDMOND HAMILTON

SEABURY QUINN

ROBERT BLOCH

The Horror Undying

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

*A grim and gruesome tale of a strange appetite—
the story of a grisly horror*

THE sheaf of papers—I had found it under the ancient flooring that I pulled up to make a fire—intrigued me at once. The cabin offered shelter, the blaze warmth, and now I had found entertainment. I could forget the night outside, and the blizzard and this chill forest in which I had lost myself. I could forget, too, the disquieting man with the beard and the shabby clothes who had stopped me at the edge of the trees before I began my walk, mumbling something about "haunted places." A foreigner, evidently, who smelled abominably of garlic.

Sitting on a broken stool before the fireplace, I spread the ragged, faded sheets upon my knee.

The largest item was a paper-backed book or pamphlet, of the size of an old-fashioned dime novel. In my fancy I can see, now as then, the limp, discolored cover, tinted red by the flickering fire-light, and the lengthy title in uneven, ornate capitals:

A TRUE STORY
OF
THE REVOLTING AND BLOODY CRIMES OF
SERGEANT I. STANLAS, U. S. A.,
HIS COURT-MARTIAL AND EXECUTION

Below this promising indication of excitement within, there was a boldly executed woodcut of a full-length human figure. I held it close to the flames for a clearer view.

The dress, I saw at once, was the American cavalry uniform of the middle Nineteenth Century—shiny boots with spurs, stripe-sided pantaloons, a brief dragoon

jacket and a round, vizored cap. Three chevrons upon the sleeve stamped the man as a sergeant, and even as I noted this my eye caught more and smaller words beneath the picture: *Sergeant Stanlas, from a drawing by the Author, and under this the information: Privately printed, 1848; price ten cents.*

"Ten cents!" Was it a dime novel after all, a dime novel of especially thrilling content? Remembering such shockers as *The Feast of Blood*, *The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, *The Secret of the Gray Turret*, and others, I studied the cover illustration again.

The author-artist had depicted his subject in a pose at once formalized and dashing. The booted, spurred feet were planted jauntily apart, toes pointing outward at what must have been an uncomfortable angle. The right hand was thrust into the front of the dragoon jacket, Napoleon fashion, while the left rested elegantly upon a saber-hilt. It was all a trifle ludicrous and waxworky. I might have laughed at it, except for the face.

It was a round face, framed in heavy side-whiskers. The eyes beneath the cap-vizor were large and expressionless, and so placed as to seem to stare out at anyone who looked at the picture. Below and between them jutted a long, straight nose, thin and sharp as a chisel. The mouth was half open and lipless, and showed two tiny, pointed upper teeth. The chin—well, there was no chin, or very little. Despite the crudity and stiff-

ness of the old woodcut as a whole, that countenance had something of dread, authentic life. I paused to throw more floor-boards on the fire, then opened the pamphlet and began to read.

THE opening of the narrative was flat, in keeping with the style of the 1840's. It said, rather casually, that one Ivan Stanlas was born in Prussia near the Polish border about the year 1810, and that he came to America as a boy of twelve. In 1827, five years after his arrival, he enlisted in the United States army. His record, it appeared, was good, even brilliant—the anonymous biographer suggested that had Stanlas been of American birth he might have won an officer's commission. Foreigner though he was, he rose rapidly to the rank of sergeant first class, and as such did several tours of duty at forts in the south and west. At the outbreak of the Mexican War he saw active service with a dragoon regiment and was wounded at Monterey. In 1847 he was senior non-commissioned officer of a squadron ordered to build and garrison a fort in the western part of the newly acquired territory of Texas.

Up to this point the narrator had seemed vague, as if information on Sergeant Stanlas' early career was his only by hearsay, but the incident of the fort-building and all that followed was by contrast extraordinarily clear and vivid. I, reading by the firelight, guessed that the unknown pamphleteer must have made Stanlas' actual acquaintance at that time; perhaps the forming of the squadron brought together the units in which the two men had been serving.

The fort came in for full, eloquent description—a rectangular stockade of upright logs with sharp tips, rough barracks and stables in orderly array inside, neat ricks of hay cut on the prairies, troops

drilling or working under the eyes of their officers, sentries on post, and over all the brilliant stir of the Stars and Stripes. The war was over now; the garrison felt relieved and relaxed, even peaceful. But a terror was to come that would dwarf the grimmest adventure of the oldest and most seasoned veteran.

Nothing for a time but boresome routine. Then, twice in succession, the account stated, sentries were found dead in the dawn—or rather, what was left of sentries.

The bodies were mangled, mutilated, bloody, the fleshiest parts cut clean away and missing. Indian raiders, was the instant pronouncement of the commanding officer, and after the second atrocity a scouting party was sent out to find and punish the enemy. Stanlas himself rode with that party and it was he who found, or appeared to find, a trail. Following him, the avengers rode for four hours across the prairie and came at last upon an encampment of Comanche hunters.

Taken by surprise, a full half of the Indians fell before the first deadly volley of the troops. The others fled on their swiftest ponies without offering battle. Several wounded Indians were captured and questioned, but all denied attacking or even visiting the fort. They feared, it seemed, a devil that sneaked and hunted around their campfires at night and devoured women, children and even full-grown warriors—a devil that lurked and laired among the white men.

The soldiers naturally scorned this story as fantastic and brought back the prisoners, five of them. As they approached the fort, it was recorded, the Indians trembled fearfully. That night they were placed in the hospital building, and on the following morning one was missing. He was reported "escaped despite severe wounds and close guard," and double vigilance was instituted. A

day and a night passed, a new sun rose, and a second Indian had vanished.

Stanlas happened to be sergeant of the guard on this particular morning, and the commander of the garrison, investigating in the hospital, called upon him for a report. As Stanlas entered, the three remaining Indians set up a wild and unwarriorly wail of terror. All jabbering at once, they expressed sudden dread of the sergeant. He, they charged, had killed and carried away their two comrades—he was the "devil of the fort" which they now knew would be their ultimate destroyer.

Stanlas listened in scornful silence for a moment or two, then broke in upon their frantic charges with angry denials. When they refused to retract, he whipped out his saber and slashed the nearest Indian across the face. Disarmed by two troopers, he was placed under arrest by the commander. A routine search of his quarters was ordered.

As senior sergeant of the garrison, Stanlas had a one-room cabin to himself, and the flooring in it proved loose (reading at this point, I glanced down nervously at the vacant space I had torn in the floor of my own shelter). The boards lifted, searchers saw loose earth. A few probing digs with a spade discovered the skeletons of the two missing Indians, stripped almost entirely of flesh.

FROM this point forward the narrative grew tense and fascinatingly dire, as if the author was bringing a morbid warmth to his work. Sergeant Stanlas, confronted with the grisly findings, confessed to cannibalism. He had murdered and eaten, not only these and other Indians, but the two butchered sentries and many other white men and women in the East. How many, he did not know; all he could say was "more than fifty, perhaps a hundred." Explanation he could

not or would not give, except that he was tormented with an overpowering hunger for human flesh. He relished most the heart and the liver.

Facing the court-martial, he pleaded guilty and made a singular request. That speech of Sergeant Stanlas sticks closest in my memory, for I returned later and read it again:

"Burn me to ashes, I greatly wish it. Only thus can my soul be redeemed."

The officers of the court-martial—they must have been a shocked and pallid gathering—passed sentence, but decreed a less painful death than the one for which the confessed man-eater had begged. He was placed before a firing-squad, to make which, the pamphlet said, every one of his former comrades volunteered. After Stanlas had fallen before their shots, the sergeant in charge of the detail walked close to examine him. The bloody form was seen to move, the eyes slowly opened. Drawing a pistol, the sergeant fired a bullet point-blank through Stanlas' brain, and a few minutes later a medical officer pronounced the guilty one dead. The riddled corpse was buried outside the fort at a considerable distance from the regular cemetery and was left unmarked.

That was the end of the account, at least of the printed part. But at the foot of the final page was a rusty-looking smudge. I drew a brand from the fire to shed brighter and more direct light. With difficulty I made out a single word, written crabbedly and in ink so ancient and faded as to be almost invisible: "*Fools.*"

I closed the pamphlet and gazed once more at the portrait of Ivan Stanlas upon the cover. As before, the expressionless eyes seemed to stare fixedly at me; even so, I mused, must the real man's eyes have looked while his fellow-sergeant gave him the *coup de grace*. And the loose

mouth seemed to smile at me in mockery. I felt suddenly nauseated with the blood-boltered tale. Whether it was true or not I refused to guess. My chief desire was to forget it as quickly as possible, to find more pleasant reading-matter for a lonely night in a strange, isolated cabin. Dropping the pamphlet to the floor, I turned my attention to the other papers in my lap.

There remained a couple of loose sheets or scraps, fastened together with a corroded pin. Removing this, I studied the topmost fragment.

IT WAS a roughly torn upper quarter of an inside page from an old newspaper. At the top margin I could make out a part of a heading: "... *ita Eagle*, July 11, 1879." The torn piece was three columns wide and filled with short news items, mostly paragraphs with date-lines, grist of the journal's telegraph mill. To such inner pages might a reader turn leisurely after he had satisfied a more pressing news hunger with long accounts on the front page of war in Europe or scandal at home. Around one of the small items, centrally located on the middle column of the sheet, was drawn a bold circle in dark ink, as if to direct attention to it.

The headline, also included within the circle, was in small type, and I remember it as follows:

MERCY FOR SOLDIER-MURDERER
Sgt. Maxim's Death Sentence Commuted

Beneath this I read, substantially in these words:

Fort Fetterman, Wyo., July 9—The War Department today ordered the sentence of Sergeant Wilfred Maxim, previously condemned to death by court-martial, to be commuted to life imprisonment.

Maxim, who was convicted of a strange and brutal crime—the killing of a civilian laborer and the drinking of his blood—had been hanged in full view of his former comrades some weeks ago. Pronounced dead and cut down, he revived. When ordered to mount the scaffold and be hanged a second time, he protested that, being once certified deceased, the full penalty of his crime was

paid and he should be set free. He was held prisoner while the higher authority at Washington was consulted and handed down the commutation of sentence.

A special guard will take Maxim to Fort Leavenworth for confinement.

Just below this final short paragraph came the juncture of the two ends of the line that formed the inked circle, and the pen had apparently wavered over them. No, not exactly; on closer examination I was sure that a word had been written beneath the item and upon the line of the circle, a scrawled, crabbed word: "*Fools.*"

I twitched nervously, and my hands involuntarily clenched. The crackling sound of the old paper as it squashed in my grip made me start violently. I frowned in uneasy mystification.

Brief as the news article was, and almost deadly dull in its patterned journalistic phraseology, it reeked with unvoiced dread. What did it mean—it and the pamphlet which told a tale so ghastly parallel?

Two murderers had lived, two veritable vultures in man's guise, one exposed in 1847, the other thirty-two years later in 1879. Each was an army man, each had the special ability and personality to win himself a sergeant's stripes. Each killed his fellow-man in secret, for the gratification of a horrible hunger. Each was condemned to death, and each proved almost impossible to kill. Each man's story had been published, and some collector of strange and revolting data had found both accounts, hiding them together under the floor of this old cabin—yes, and each published story had come under the hand of a commentator who, through scorn or unbelief or macabre humor, had stamped each with the word: "*Fools.*"

I pored over the inked circle and the written word upon the newspaper. They, too, were faded, but not as much as the scrawl in the pamphlet, and the hand-

writing was strikingly similar. My judgment was that they were the work of the same penman, and that each was jotted down at the approximate time of the publication date of the account thus distinguished.

I Laid the half-crumpled fragment of newspaper on the floor beside the pamphlet. The remaining sheet stared up from my knee—a simple handbill, once folded small and now falling apart along its smoothed-out creases. It bore bold-faced type:

\$100—REWARD—\$100
For the Capture of
WILFRED MAXIM
ESCAPED MURDERER
July 14, 1879

A description followed, which I do not remember clearly except for one phrase: "*Age about 36.*" So Sergeant Maxim and Sergeant Stanlas, at the times of their respective captures, had been alike in age as well as profession, rank and depraved appetite. I shook myself, as if to dislodge panicky thoughts that crept upon the fringes of my consciousness. A corner of the reward notice, I saw, drooped heavily. Something was pasted to its back. I turned it over.

A photograph looked up, a faded and discolored likeness of a uniformed man's head and shoulders. Under it was written, "*Bill Maxim, Jan. 7, 1872.*" I knew that crabbed handwriting at once. I knew, too, the face—but that was unbelievable, unspeakable. . . .

The old soldier's cheeks and jaws were thickly bearded. I could barely see a loose, greedy-looking mouth in the midst of that bushy hair. But the eyes were wide and vacant under their joined brows, the nose jutted straight and chisel-sharp. I started to voice an exclamation, but my lips were gone dry and numb. I stooped slowly for the discarded pamphlet. My hands trembled as they held the two por-

traits toward the flickering light—the photograph and the wood-cut.

I was sure then, and gasped inarticulately with the fearful knowledge.

Ivan Stanlas, shot almost to pieces, had not rested in his disgraced, unmarked grave. He had struggled up from under that burden of earth, had walked again. He had joined the army under a new name, had risen in rank, and was caught as before in the act of feeding loathsomely. Better for him and for the world had his first court-martial done as he had pleaded—what were the words?

I fumbled through the pages to the back of the pamphlet. Again I read: "Burn me to ashes, I greatly wish it. Only thus can my soul be redeemed."

A certainty that was more terrifying than blackest mystery drew in upon me, like a strangling net. With all my strength I hurled pamphlet, newspaper and handbill into the fire. The flames crackled greedily over the old sheets, threw up bright tongues; yet I trembled with a chill that was not of the outer blizzard. And a voice soft as a sigh and fierce as a snarl spoke from the door: "*Fool! . . .*"

The door was open. A figure in a long, dark, formless garment like a cloak or blanket was standing there, shaking wreaths of snow from its head and shoulder. As I gaped, silent and helpless as a charmed bird before a snake, it glided forward to the fire. The enveloping robe sagged open, then slid gently downward from the upper part of the figure.

I saw a round face, pale as bleached bone. Coarse, bushy hair grew low and rank upon a narrow forehead. Wide, expressionless eyes fixed mine, gleaming above the thin nose that seemed to point the way for them with its tip. A shallow chin relaxed, a loose, lipless mouth

fell open. Two pointed upper teeth grinned at me.

I tried to say something, to threaten or beg, but I could not. I only shrank back, and he stole forward, into the stronger light. A hand extended toward me. I saw curved talons, thick hair matted upon wrist and back and palm. . . .

Then came a cry, powerful and ringing as a bugle, a torrent of strange, challenging words. Another figure was bursting through the door and toward us. The first comer turned hurriedly from me. For a moment I saw his pale, chisel-beaked face in profile, heard the cloak rustle like dried skin. Then the other was upon him in a rush.

Fierce eyes above a bristling beard, an assailing odor of garlic, drove into my mind that this was the mumbler I had met at the forest's edge. His upflung hand flourished a staff, a heavy, straight rod with a piece lashed upon it to form a cross. It did not strike, but the sergeant squeaked fearfully, like a bat, and cowered swaying before it. A foot tripped him and, as he fell sprawling, the same foot gave him a spurning shove that slid him in among the coals of the fire.

White flame sprang up all around and over him, as though he had exploded. I shuddered, and the next moment all was black silence to me.

I WOKE laggingly, to the touch of ministering hands, and found myself lying limply on the floor. Above me stooped the bearded face, anxious and kindly now.

"It is all over," came the grave, accented voice, with a note of triumph in it. "Long have I hunted and hoped, and today, when you entered his domain, I knew you would serve for bait. I made preparations and followed." He drew something from his pocket. "A stake through his heart and holy water would

have been better, but the cross of white-thorn and the fire and this herb"—he threw a handful of garlic into the fireplace—"will serve. He—Stanias or Maxim or whoever he is—will walk and raven no more."

Weakly I rose. Something made a feeble scuttling noise on the hearth, and I looked. The dying fire, now rank with the garlic vapors, was full of dark, fat-looking ashes that never came from wood. Out of these was scrambling some small creeper—a rat or lizard, perhaps. Before I got a fair glimpse of it my companion thrust it back with his staff. It did not appear again.

"Perhaps that was his cursed soul," commented my rescuer. "Do not be afraid, I know that all will be well. Before the Russian Revolution I was a priest in Moscow, and studied these things. By dawn his last shred of foul flesh, his last splinter of undead bone, will be consumed in the cleansing heat."

Stooping, he began to gather floorboards.

"You're a priest?" I repeated stupidly. "I was beginning to understand before you came. His story said that he wished to be burned."

"I knew of those writings, but I did not disturb them lest he be warned and guard against me. The ancient legends are not legends; they are truth denied by fear. In his first existence he was *volkod-lok*—werewolf. Facing death, he must have had a desperate hope of salvation, and he made that request. He knew that, if he were killed painlessly and his body left whole, he would still live as *upir*—what you call vampire."

He threw his armful of wood upon the fire, and it began to crackle with bright, merry warmth.

"My son," said the priest, "have the fear of God before your eyes."

JULY, 1936

Weird Tales

JULY

Red Nails

a fascinating story of
the black lotus and
the queerest people
ever spawned.

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

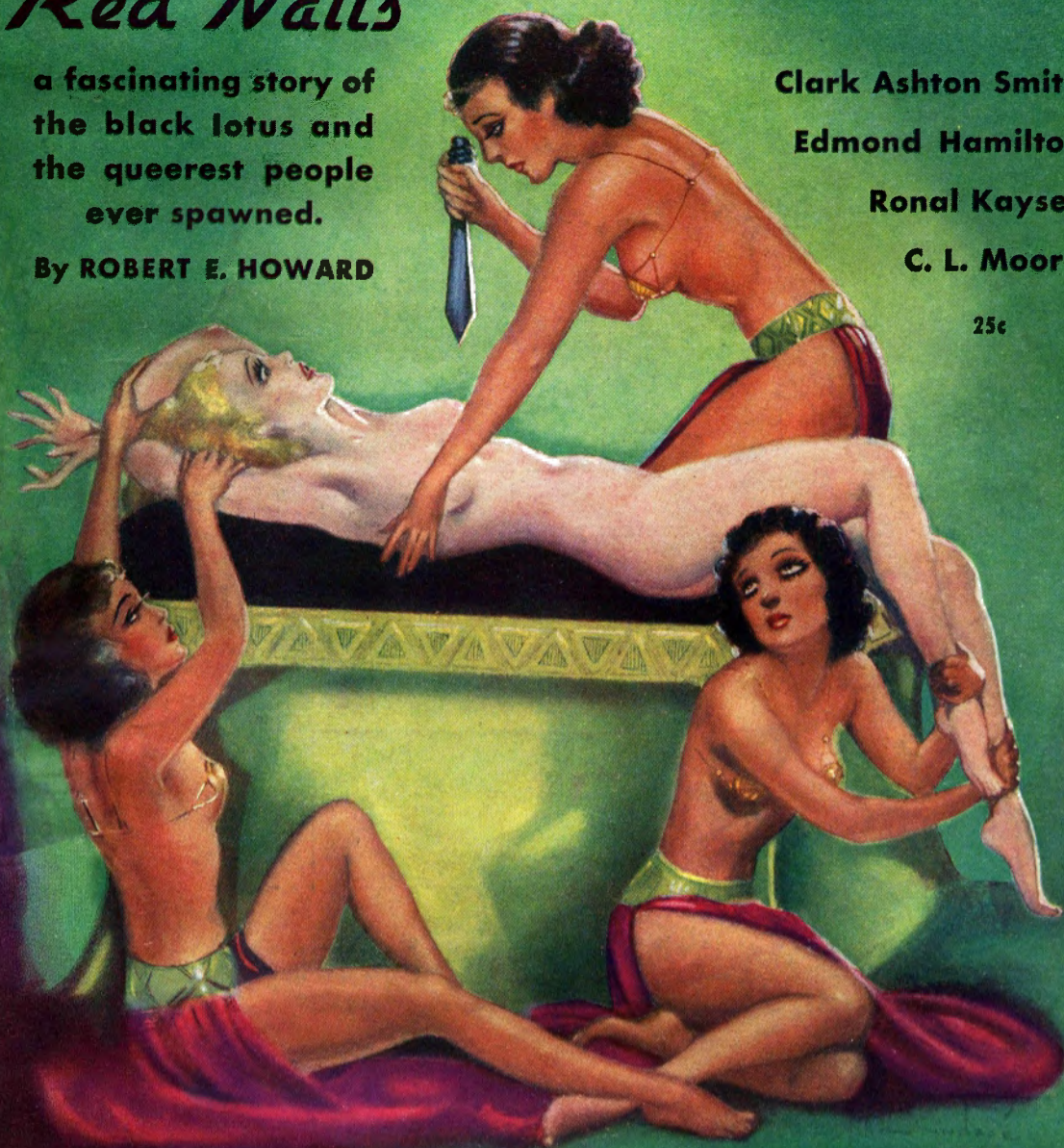
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WEIRD TALES

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The Kelpie

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

*What was that Thing that rose up out of the little aquarium?—
a brief tale of horror*

NO SOONER had Cannon closed and latched the door than Lu was in his arms, and they were kissing with the hungry fierceness of lovers who doubt their own good fortune. Thus for a delirious, heart-battering moment; then Lu pulled nervously away.

"We're being watched," she whispered breathlessly.

The big, dark man laughed down at her worried blue eyes, her shining wealth of ale-brown hair, her face like an ivory heart, the apprehensive tautness of her slender figure. "That's guilty conscience, Lu," he teased. "You know I wouldn't have invited you to my apartment without giving my man the night off. And even if someone did see us, why be afraid? Don't we love each other?"

She allowed him to bring her into the parlor and draw her down beside him on a divan, but she still mused apprehensively.

"I could swear there were eyes upon us," she insisted, half apologetically. "Hostile eyes."

"Maybe they're spirits," Cannon cried gayly, his own twinkling gaze sweeping around to view in turn the paintings on the walls, the hooded lamps, the bookshelves, the rich, comfortable furniture, the big box-shaped aquarium in the darkest corner. Again he chuckled. "Spirits—that's a pun, you know. The lowest form of wit."

From a taboret at his elbow he lifted a decanter of brandy and poured two

drinks with a humorous flourish. Lu, forgetting her uneasiness of a moment before, lifted her glass. "To us," she toasted.

But Cannon set his own drink down untasted and peered around a second time, this time without gayety. "You've got me thinking it now," he muttered.

"Thinking what?"

"That something is watching—and not liking what it sees." He glanced quickly over his shoulder, then continued, as if seeking to reassure them both. "Nothing in that corner, of course, except the aquarium."

"What's the latest tenantry there?" Lu asked, glad to change the disquieting subject.

"Some Scotch water plants—new laboratory project." Cannon was at ease the moment his hobby came into the conversation. "They arrived this afternoon in a sealed tin box. Doctor MacKenzie's letter says they were gathered from the Pool Kelp, wherever that is in his highland wildernesses. I'm letting them soak and wash overnight. In the morning I'll begin experimenting."

Lu sipped more brandy, her eyes interested. "Pool Kelp," she repeated. "It sounds seaweedy."

"But these are fresh-water growths. As I say, I never heard of the pool before." Cannon broke off. "Here, though, why talk botany when we can——"

His lips abruptly smothered hers, his arms gathered her so close as to bruise

her. But even as she yielded happily to his embrace the telephone rang loudly in the front entry. Cannon released her with a muttered curse of impatience, rose and hurried out to answer. He closed the door behind him, and his voice, muffled and indistinct, sounded aggrieved as he spoke into the transmitter.

Lu, finishing her brandy alone, picked up the drink Cannon had set down. As she lifted it to her lips she glanced idly over the rim of the glass at the moist tangle in the aquarium. In the dim light it seemed to fall into all manner of rich greens—darkest emerald, beryl, malachite, olive, grass, lettuce. Something moved, too, filliped and swerved in the heart of the little submerged grove.

Cannon was still talking. Lu rose, drink in hand, to stroll curiously toward the big glass box. As she did so the moving trifle seemed to glide upward toward the surface. Coming closer yet, Lu paused to peer in the half-light.

A fish? If so, a very green fish and a very small one—perhaps a tadpole. A bubble broke audibly on top of the water. Lu, genuinely interested, bent closer, just as something rose through the little ripples and hooked its tip on the rim of the aquarium.

It was a tiny, spinach-colored hand.

Half a second later another fringe of tiny fingers appeared, clutching the rim in turn. Lu, woodenly motionless, stared in her effort to rationalize. She could see the tiny digits, each tapering and flexible, each armed with a jet-colored claw. Through the glass, under and behind the fingers, she made out thumbs—deft, opposable thumbs—and smooth, wet palms of a dead, oystery gray. Her breath caught in mute, helpless astonishment. A blunt head rose slowly into view behind and between the fists, something with flat brow, broad lump of nose and wide

mouth, like a grotesque Mayan mask—and it was *growing*.

Lu told herself, a little stupidly, that she must not have seen clearly at first. She had thought the creature a little green minnow, but it was as big as a squirrel. No, as big as a baby! Its bright eyes, white-ringed, fixed hers, projecting a wave of malignant challenge that staggered her like a blow. The full, lead-hued lips parted loosely and the forked tip of a purple tongue quivered out for a moment. A snaky odor steamed up to Lu's nostrils, making her dizzy and weak. Wet, scabby-green shoulders had heaved into view by now, and after them the twin mounds of a grotesquely feminine bosom. The thing was climbing out at her, and as it did so it swelled and grew, grew. . . .

THE brandy-glass fell from her hand and loudly exploded into splinters upon the floor. The sound of the breaking gave Lu back her voice, and she screamed tremulously, then managed to move back and away, half stumbling and half staggering. The monster, all damp and green and stinking, was writhing a leg into view. Lu noted that, and then everything went into a whirling white blur and she began to collapse.

Faintly she heard the rush of Cannon's feet, felt the clutch of his strong arms as though many thicknesses of fabric separated them from her. He almost shouted her name in panic. After a moment her sight and mind cleared, and she looked up into his concerned face. With all her shaken strength she clung to him.

"That thing," she chattered, "that horrid female thing in the aquarium——"

Cannon managed a comforting tone. "But there's nothing, dearest, nothing at all. Those two brandies—you took mine, too, you shameless glutton—went to your head."

"Look at it!" She pointed an unsteady finger. "Deep down there in the weeds."

He looked. "Oh, that?" he laughed. "I noticed it, too, just before you came. It's a little frog or toad—must have been gathered with the weeds and shipped all the way from Scotland."

Lu caressed her throbbing forehead with her slender white hand and mumbled something about "seeing things." Already she believed that she had somehow dreamed of the green water-monster. Still, it was a distinct effort to walk with Cannon to the aquarium and look in.

Through the thick tangle of stems and fronds that made a dank stew in the water she could make out a tiny something that wriggled and glided. It was only minnow-size after all, and seemed smooth and innocuous. Funny what notions two quick drinks will give you. . . . She lowered a cupped palm toward the surface, as if to scoop down and seize the little creature, but the chilly touch of the topmost weed-tips repelled her, and she drew back her arm.

"You'd never catch it," Cannon told her. "It won't wait for you to grab. I had a try when I first saw it, and got a wet sleeve—and this."

He held out his left hand. For the first time that evening Lu saw the gold band that he wore on his third finger.

"A ring," her lover explained. "It was lying on the bottom. Apparently it came with the weeds, too."

"You put it on your wedding finger!" Lu waived.

"That was the only one it would fit," Cannon defended as she caught his hand and tugged with all her might at the ring. It did not budge.

"Please," she begged, "get rid of it."

"Why, Lu, what's the trouble? Are you being jealous because a present was given me by that mess of weed—or maybe by the little lady frog?"

The tiny swimmer in the tank splashed water, as if in punctuation of his joke, and Cannon, falling abruptly silent, suddenly began wrenching at the gold circlet. But not even his strength, twice that of Lu, could bring it over the joint.

"Here, I don't like this," he announced, his voice steady but a little tight. "I'm going to put soap on my finger. That will make the thing slip off."

Lu made no reply, but her eyes encouraged him. Cannon kissed her pale forehead, strode across the room and into a little corridor beyond. After a moment Lu could hear the spurt of a water-jet in a bowl, then the sound of industrious scrubbing with lather.

IN COMMAND of herself once again but still a trifle faint and shaky, Lu leaned her hand lightly upon the thick, smooth edge of the aquarium glass. A fond little smile came to her lips as she pondered on Cannon's eagerness to please her whim. Not even in a silly little matter like this one did he cross her will or offer argument that might embarrass or hurt her. The shedding of that ring would be a symbol between them, of understanding and faith.

Her eyes dropped to the table that stood against the aquarium, with its litter of papers and notebooks. At the edge nearest Lu lay a thick volume bound in gray—a dictionary. What was the term she had puzzled over? Oh, yes. . . . Still lounging with one hand on the glass, she flipped the book open with the other and turned the pages to the K's:

Kelp: Any one of various large brown seaweeds of the families *Laminariaceae* and *Fucaceae*.

Her hazy memory had been right, then, about the word. But why should a body of fresh water be called Pool Kelp? Glancing back at the page, her eyes caught the next definition.

It answered her question.

Kelpie: (*Gael. Myth.*) A malicious water spirit or demon believed to haunt streams or marshes. Sometimes it falls in love with human beings, striving jealously against mortal rivals. . . .

The words swam before her vision, for the snake-smell had risen sickeningly around her. And something was gripping the hand that rested on the rim of the tank.

Lu's mouth opened, but, as before, terror throttled her. Like a sleeper in the throes of nightmare, she struggled half-heartedly. She dared not look, yet some power forced her head around.

The grip had shifted to her wrist. Long, claw-tipped fingers were clamped there—fingers as large as her own, scrofulous green and of a swampy chill. Lu's eyes slid in fascinated horror along the scale-ridged, corded arm to the moldy-looking body, stuck and festooned over with weed-fronds, that was rising from the water. Another foul hand stole swiftly out, fastened on Lu's shoulder, and jerked her close. The flat, grotesque face, grown to human size, was level with hers, its eyes triumphant within their dead white rings, its dark tongue quivering between gaping lips.

Yet again Lu tried to find her voice. All she could achieve was a wordless moan, no louder than a sigh.

"Did you call, sweetheart?" came Cannon's cheery response from his washing. "I'll be with you in a minute now; this thing is still hanging on like a poor relation!"

The reptilian jaw dropped suddenly, like the lid of a box turned upside down. Lu stared into the slate-gray cave that was the yawning mouth. Teeth, sharp teeth, gleamed there—not one row, but many.

Lu's hands lifted feebly in an effort at defense, then dropped wearily to her

sides. The monster crinkled its humid features in something like a triumphant grin. Then its blunt head shot forward with incredible swiftness, nuzzling Lu at the juncture of neck and shoulder.

For a moment she felt exquisite pain, as of many piercing needles. After that she neither felt, heard nor saw anything.

THE medical examiner was drawing a sheet over the still, agony-distorted body of the dead girl. The police sergeant, scribbling his final notes, addressed Cannon with official sternness.

"Sorry," he said, "but you haven't explained this business at all satisfactorily. You come down to headquarters with me."

Cannon glanced wanly up from his senseless wrestling with the ring that would not quit his wedding finger. "I didn't do it," he reiterated dully.

The medical examiner was also speaking, more to himself than anyone: "An autopsy might clear up some points. Those inflamed, suppurated wounds on the neck might have been made by a big water-snake. Or," he added, with a canny glance at the sergeant, "by a poisoned weapon constructed to simulate such a creature's bite."

Cannon's last vestige of control went. "I tell you," he snarled desperately, "that she and I were the only living things here tonight—the only living things." He broke off, becoming aware of movement in the aquarium. "Except, of course, that little frog in there."

The creature among the weeds, a tiny sliver of agile greenness, cavorted for a moment on the surface of the water as if in exultation, then, before any of the three watchers could get a fair look at it, dived deep into the heart of the floating mess.

All Stories Complete

Weird Tales

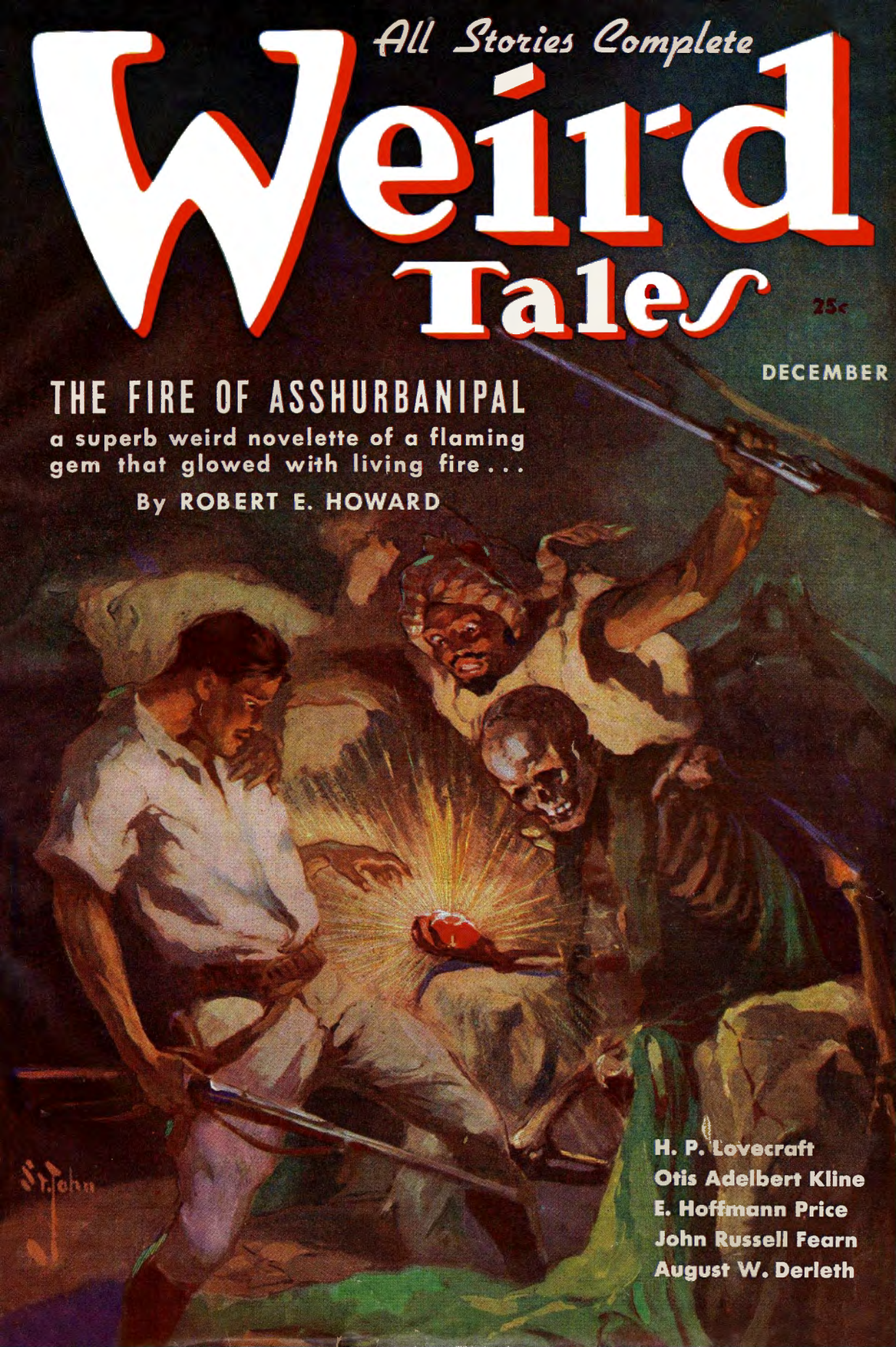
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DECEMBER

THE FIRE OF ASSHURBANIPAL

a superb weird novelette of a flaming
gem that glowed with living fire...

By ROBERT E. HOWARD



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The Theater Upstairs

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

A weird and uncanny story about a motion-picture show, in which dead actors and actresses flickered across the silver screen

LOOK, a picture theater—who'd expect one here?"

Luther caught my arm and dragged me to a halt. We'd been out on a directionless walk through lower Manhattan that evening—"flitting" was Luther's word, cribbed, I think, from Robert W. Chambers. The old narrow street where we now paused had an old English name and was somewhere south and east of Chinatown. Its line of dingy shops had foreign words on their dim windows, and lights and threadbare curtains up above where their proprietors lodged. And right before us, where Luther had stopped to gaze, was a narrow wooden door that bore a white card. CINEMA, it said in bold, plain capitals. And, in smaller letters below: Georgia Wattell.

I was prepared to be embarrassed by that name. Everyone suspected, and a few claimed to know positively, that

Georgia Wattell had committed suicide at the height of her Hollywood career because Luther had deserted her. But my companion did not flinch, only drew up that thick body of his. A smile wrinkled his handsome features, features that still meant box-office to any picture, even though they were softening from too much food and drink and so forth.

"Wonder which of Georgia's things it is," Luther mused, with a gayety slightly forced. "Come on, I'll stand you a show."

I didn't like it, but refusal would seem accusation. So I let him draw me through the door.

WE HAD stairs to walk up—creaky old stairs. They were so narrow that we had to mount in single file, our shoulders brushing first one wall, then the other. I was mystified, for doesn't a

New York ordinance provide that theaters cannot be on upper floors? There was no light on those stairs, as I remember, only a sort of grayness filtering from above. At any rate, we saw better when we came to the little foyer at the top. A shabby man stood there, with lead-colored eyes in his square face and a great shock of coarse gray hair.

"Admission a quarter," he mumbled in a soft, hoarse voice, and accepted the half-dollar Luther produced. "Go on in."

With one hand he pocketed the coin and with the other drew back a dark, heavy curtain. We entered a long hall, groped our way to seats—we were the only patrons, so far as I could tell—and almost at once the screen lit up with the title: *THE HORLA*, by Guy de Maupassant.

"Creepy stuff—good!" muttered Luther with relish, then added some other comment on the grisly classic. What with trying to hear him and read the cast of players at the same moment, I failed in both efforts. The shimmering words on the screen dissolved into a pictured landscape, smitten by rain which the sound apparatus mimicked drearily. In the middle distance appeared a cottage, squat and ancient, with a droopy, soft-seeming roof like the cap of a toadstool. The camera viewpoint sailed down and upon it, in what Luther called a "dolly shot." We saw at close quarters the front porch.

Two women sat on the top step, exchanging the inconsequential opening dialog. Georgia Wattell seated at center with her sad, dark face turned front, was first recognizable. Her companion, to one side and in profile, offered to our view a flash of silver-blond hair and a handsome, feline countenance.

"It's Lilyan Tashman," grunted Luther, and shut up his mouth with a snap. He might have said more about this uneasy vision of two dead actresses talking and

moving, but he did not. A third figure was coming into view at the left, shedding a glistening waterproof and a soaked slouch hat. My first glimpse of his smooth black hair and close-set ears, seen from behind, struck a chord of memory in me. Then his face swiveled around into view, and I spoke aloud.

"This can't be!" I protested. "Why, Rudolph Valentino died before anybody even dreamed of sound pic——"

But it was Valentino nevertheless, and he had been about to speak to the two women. However, just as I exclaimed in my unbelieving amazement, he paused and faced front. His gaze seemed to meet mine, and suddenly I realized how big he was on the screen, eight or ten feet high at the least. Those brilliant eyes withered me, his lip twitched over his dazzling teeth—the contemptuous rebuke-expression of an actor to a noisy audience.

So devastatingly real was that shadowy, snub that I almost fell from my seat. I know that Luther swore, and that I felt sweaty all over. When I recovered enough to assure myself that my imagination was too lively, Valentino had turned back to deliver his interrupted entrance line. The show went on.

So far there was nothing to remind me of de Maupassant's story as I had read it. But with Valentino's first speech and Georgia Wattell's answer the familiar plot began. Of course, it was freely modified, like most film versions of the classics. For one thing, the victim of the invisible monster was not a man but a woman — Georgia, to be exact — and it seemed to me at the time that this change heightened the atmosphere of helpless horror. Valentino might have done something vigorous, either spiritual or physical, against de Maupassant's *Horla*. Georgia Wattell, with her sorrowfully lovely face and frail little body, seemed inescapably foredoomed.

The remainder of the action on the porch was occupied by Georgia's description of the barely-understood woes she was beginning to suffer at the Horla's hands. Miss Tashman as her friend and Valentino as her lover urged her to treat everything as a fancy and to tell herself that all would be well. She promised—but how vividly she acted the part of an unbeliever in her own assurance! Then the image of the porch, with those three shadows of dead players posed upon it in attitudes of life, faded away.

THE next scene was a French country bedroom—curtained bed, *prie-dieu* and so on. Georgia Wattell entered it, unfastening her clothing.

"Ho!" exploded Luther somewhat lasciviously, but I did not stop to be disgusted with him. My mind was wrestling with the situation, how items so familiar in themselves—lower New York, the motion picture business, the performers, de Maupassant's story—could be so creepy in combination.

Well, Georgia took off her dress. I saw, as often before, that she had a lovely bosom and shoulders, for all her fragility. Over her underthings she drew an ample white robe, on the collar of which fell her loosened dark hair. Kneeling for a moment at the *prie-dieu*, she murmured a half-audible prayer, then turned toward the bed. At that moment there entered—just where, I cannot say—the Horla.

It was quite the finest and weirdest film device I have ever seen. No effect in the picture versions of *Frankenstein* or *Dracula* remotely approached it. Without outline or opacity, less tangible than a shimmer of hot air, yet it gave the impression of living malevolence. I felt aware of its presence upon the screen without actually seeing it; but how could it have been suggested without being visible? I should like to discuss this point

with someone else who saw the picture, but I have never yet found such a person.

It was there, anyway. Georgia registered sudden and uneasy knowledge of it. Her body shuddered a trifle inside the robe and she paused as if in indecision, then moved toward the bed. A moment later she moaned wildly and staggered a bit. The thing, whatever triumph of photo-dramatic trickery it was, enveloped her.

She went all blurred and indistinct, as though seen through water. Doesn't de Maupassant himself use that figure of speech? Then the attacking entity seemed to pop out into a faint approach to human shape. I could see shadowy arms winding around the shrinking girl, a round, featureless head bowed as if its maw sought her throat. She screamed loudly and began to struggle. Then Valentino and Miss Tashman burst into the room.

With their appearance the Horla released her and seemed to retire into its half-intangible condition. I, who had utterly forgotten that I saw only a film, sighed my inexpressible relief at the thing's momentary defeat, then whispered to Luther.

"I don't like this," I said. "Let's get out, or I won't sleep tonight."

"We stay right here," he mumbled back, his eyes bright and fascinated as they kept focussed on the screen.

Valentino was holding Georgia close, caressing her to quiet her hysterics and speaking reassuringly in his accented English. Lilyan Tashman said something apparently meant for comedy relief, which was badly needed at this point. But neither Luther nor I laughed.

Georgia suddenly cried out in fresh fear.

"It's there in the corner!" she wailed, turning toward the spot where the Horla must be lurking.

Both her companions followed her

gaze, apparently seeing nothing. For that matter I saw nothing myself, though I well knew the thing was there.

Valentino made another effort to calm her.

"I'll put a bullet into it, darling," he offered, with an air of falling in with her morbid humor. "In the corner, you say?"

From his pocket he drew a revolver. But Georgia, suddenly calming her shudders, snatched the weapon from his hand.

"Don't!" she begged. "How can a bullet harm something that has no life like ours?"

"Here, don't point that gun at me!" begged Miss Tashman, retreating in comic fright.

Georgia moved forward in the picture, looming larger than her companions. "You can't kill spirits," she went on, tonelessly and quite undramatically. "Bullets are for *living* enemies."

She gazed out upon us.

Right here is where the whole business stopped being real and became nightmare. Georgia moved again, closer and closer, until her head and shoulders, with the gun hand lifted beside them, filled the screen. She looked as big as the Sphinx by then, but grim and merciless as no Sphinx ever was. And her enormous, accusing eyes weren't fixed upon me, but upon Luther.

My inner self began arguing silently. "That's odd," it said plaintively. "A gaze from the screen seems to meet that of each member of the audience. How can she be looking *past* me at——"

Georgia spoke, between immense, hardened lips, in a voice that rolled out to fill the whole theater:

"Jan Luther!"

And she swelled bigger, bigger beyond all reason; too big for the screen to contain. Suddenly there were only the hand and the gun, turned toward us like a cannon aimed point-blank.

Luther was on his feet, screaming.

"You can't!" he challenged wildly. "You—why, you're only a shadow!"

But the screen exploded in white light, that made the whole hall bright as day for just the hundredth part of a second. After that I was trying to hold Luther erect. He sagged and slumped back into his seat in spite of all I could do. Blood purled gently down his face from a neat round hole in his forehead.

I glanced wildly at the screen. The picture had shrunk back to ordinary dimensions now, showing again the bedroom, the three performers and everything else exactly as it had been.

Georgia was offering Valentino his pistol again. "Thanks, Rudy," she said.

I SUPPOSE I must have run crazily out of there, for my next memory is of panting the story in broken sentences to a big blue-coated policeman. He frowned as I tried to tell everything at once, then came back with me to the street with the foreign-labeled shops. When I couldn't find the door and its lettered card he laughed, not very good-naturedly, and accused me of being drunk. When I tried to argue he ordered me to move along or go to jail and sleep it off.

I haven't seen Luther since, nor heard from him. There has been plenty in the papers about his disappearance, though several editors have put it down as a publicity stunt. Three times recently I have gone into the part of town where I lost him, and each time I have seen, at a little distance along a sidewalk or across a street, the white-haired, leaden-eyed man who admitted us to the theater. But, though I always tried to hail him, he lost himself among the passers-by before I reached him.

At length I have decided to stay away from there altogether. I wish I could stop thinking about the affair as well.

All Stories Complete

Weird Tales

MARCH

25c

The Unique Magazine

"STRANGE ORCHIDS"

a goose-flesh story
of weird happenings,
lovely girls, and
gorgeous flowers.

By DOROTHY QUICK

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Henry Hasse

MARCH, 1937

WEIRD TALES

Printed in
U. S. A.

Vol. 29, No. 3





The Werewolf Snarls

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

A brief story, with a breath of icy horror in it

"I WANT you to meet Mr. Craw," prattled Lola Wurther to me. "He claims to be a werewolf."

And she turned—fluttery hands, fluttery white shoulders, fluttery blond curls, fluttery skirts of green silk—to lose herself in the crowd of noisy guests at the bar. Mr. Craw and I took two or three

steps together, as though we both sought quiet.

"Sit down," I suggested, and we dropped upon a divan in the half-gloom behind Lola Wurther's big grand piano. Then we looked at each other.

He was a huge, high-shouldered creature in rather seedy dress clothes, with

W. T.—6

coarse black hair grown low on his forehead and around his flat-lying, pointed ears. His long anvil of a chin lay snugly between the wings of his collar, his long poniard of a nose lay upon his chin, and his mouth caught between was as tight and lipless as a slit in leather. The pallor of his face accentuated the wet-licorice black of his eyes. He made me feel my own physical frailty as a little, rheumatic old man half his volume.

"Well," he invited huskily, "do I look it?"

"You mean like a werewolf?" I suggested, and waited smiling for the witty retort. But he shook his head.

"It happens to be quite true," he assured me with the absolute solemnity of the very drunken or the very insane.

I jumped at that, although I was used to meeting bizarre figures in the Wurther parlor. Not knowing what to say, I kept my own nervous mouth shut. After a musing moment, Craw went on.

"I came here tonight looking for help in my desperate problem. Wurther and his wife are supposed to be experts in occultism."

"Mr. Craw," I could not help saying, "the Wurthers are unmitigated fakes."

"I was thinking that," he nodded glumly. "Apparently their only reason for letting me come was to make sport for their friends." A pause, awkward for me at least. "Well, then, shall I tell you?"

"Please do," I urged, feeling strangely foolish.

Craw hunched his shoulders, sank his head, and let his clasped hands slide down, down between his knees until the thick knuckles almost rested on the floor. There was something animal-like in the attitude: his body and limbs seemed measured and joined according to an ab-

normal pattern. His licorice eyes sought mine, and at the moment they did not look exactly human, either. Too much gloomy iris for one thing, and too little rim of white for another. In their depths lurked a green light, feeble but hard.

"It began," said Craw, "when I experimented with the witch-ointments."

"Witch-ointments?"

"Yes. Supposed to be rubbed on for changes into animal forms—made and used by magicians according to Satanic formulas. They sound fantastic, I know, but I was a medical student, working on a paper about pre-Renaissance medicine. There were several recipes."

"Recipes?" I repeated. "Not really?"

"Yes, a dozen at least. The 1896 bulletin of Johns Hopkins Hospital printed one, in an article by Doctor Robert Fletcher. Several other modern scientists have offered others, wholly or in part. And let me tell you that there's more sound pharmacy in them than you'd think."

I thought, indeed hoped, that he was merely spoofing. But there was no bantering smile upon his thin lips, and his eyes looked drawn and haggard about the corners.

"Belladonna, for instance," he amplified. "It's a common ingredient. Makes you see visions, as you probably know. And monkshood, full of deadly aconitine. Henbane, that Shakespeare called 'the insane root'; and hemlock. These and other things, made into a salve with the fat of an unbaptized child——"

"I say," I broke in again, not very politely, "you don't ask me to believe that you——"

"But I did." Again that melancholy nod of assurance. "There was a baby's body fetched to the dissecting-room at school." He paused and his eyes nar-

rowed, as though to gaze down a fearsome groove into the past. "Well, I mixed the stuff up. For a lark." His mouth slashed open in a rueful grin, revealing oversize, uneven teeth.

"You rubbed it on?" I prompted. Once more he nodded, and I pursued: "What happened?"

"Nothing." Craw sat up straight again and spoke more clearly. "I don't know what I expected to happen, or if in truth I expected anything. But I do remember feeling like a fool, and an unclean fool to boot. I started to clean the grease off, but it had absorbed into me somehow, like a vanishing cosmetic."

He shuddered slightly, briefly.

"As I say, nothing happened all that day, or that night, or the next day. But the next night," and his voice dropped suddenly to a breathy mutter, "was the night of the full moon."

On the instant I remembered a host of stories with which my childhood nurse had regaled me, stories about the full moon and its effect on the human soul and fate. Few of them had been pleasant. Craw was plunging ahead:

"Moonlight meant romance to me then, and nothing more. Collegian-like, I went on a riverside walk with a girl—a Liberal Arts sophomore. There was a sort of sandy jut out into the water, and we loitered there. Something I said made her laugh, with her face turned up to me in the moonlight. Then she stopped laughing, and her mouth twisted like a snake when you step on it."

"Whatever for?" I almost gasped.

"Her eyes—on my face—were frightened."

CRAW leaned suddenly toward me. I caught, or fancied I caught, a whiff of musky odor as from an animal cage.

In spite of myself I slid back and away from him on the cushions. I had just remembered that there was a full moon tonight.

Again Craw's tense voice: "She tried to scream and, frightened myself, I grasped her by the shoulder to calm her. When I touched her flesh, a new mood suddenly took possession of me. Of its own will my hand switched to her throat. Shaking her, I snarled at her to be silent. And she sagged down, in a faint. My thoughts and senses churned all up, as if in a new feeling of exultation at conquest. Then——"

He spread his great, spatulate fingers.

"In the morning they found her gnawed body. In the afternoon, while I was still telling myself that it was a dream, the police came to my dormitory. They found blood on my clothing and under my nails."

"You were *that* Craw!" I exclaimed.

His smile was bitter and tight-lipped this time. "Oh, so you read the papers? 'Undergraduate beast-man' the headlines called me, and 'medico monster'. What I told the police—the solemn truth—was too much for them to believe. They called in alienists. So I was sent to the asylum, not to the electric chair."

"Look here," I ventured, in a voice that threatened to close up in my throat with every word, "I think you'd better talk about something else. You shouldn't have let yourself talk about this business in the first place."

But he shook his head so emphatically that the coarse locks stirred at his narrow temples. I'm not crazy, old chap. You see, just two weeks ago I was officially certified normal." He sniffed. "How could they know the frenzy, the throttling rage and the blood-thirst, that closed over me like water in my locked room—

every month, on the night when the moon was full?"

His clenched hands lifted. I saw his nails, pointed and thick and opaque, like pieces of mussel-shell.

"I used to howl and shriek, so that the attendants came to pacify me. They got bitten for their pains; so there were barred cells and straitjackets. It was two years before a cunning sneaked in with the moon-madness, a cunning that whispered I must suffer in silence if ever I wanted to go free."

"And you were silent?"

"I was. At length the doctors had me up for another examination. They hammered at my knees for reflexes, asked a bunch of clever questions, and finally discharged me as cured." Once again a pause. "But I wasn't cured, of course."

"Surely," I mouthed in the most stupid fashion imaginable, "surely you wanted to be cured."

"Of course." Craw snapped his big teeth together after the two words, as though they needed emphasis. "So I turned to the Wuthers, as I said at the beginning. I'd heard somewhere that they knew devil and all about occultism and the night-side of the soul. A week ago I hunted James Wurther out at his club and told him the whole cursed business."

"Told him what you've just told me?"

"Exactly. And he heard me out, then said nothing for a full five minutes. Finally he smiled and said, 'I'll help you. On the night of the full moon I'll be entertaining. Come to my place then, and we'll make everything all right.'"

He leaned against the cushions, as if his story was done. I wriggled nervously, wondering whether he was very clever, even cleverer than most of the bizarre Wurther guests, or whether he was dan-

gerous. I weighed the chances of getting up and walking away without seeming too furtive. . . .

"Oh, there you are, Mr. Craw!" squealed Lola Wurther behind our shoulders. "Some new people have come—girls—and they're dying to meet——"

She swooped down upon him and bore him away toward three young women with vapid, painted smiles.

It was my chance to leave, and I took it. I crossed the room to the chairs where the hats and coats were piled. Glancing back, I saw Craw yet again, from behind.

His shoulders seemed strangely narrow, and humped in a fashion somehow hyena-like. His hair—perhaps it was not carefully combed at the back of his low skull—was shaggy. A first I had thought his ears flat, but I saw now that they inclined forward, as though involuntarily pricked up.

"He claims to be a werewolf," Lola Wurther was finishing her introduction, and a tinkle of laughter ascended all around.

I got my things and left without being noticed.

THAT was last night. Before me lies the morning paper, with an arresting headline:

4 TORN CORPSES FOUND IN PARLOR

Police Baffled Over Murder
of James Wurther and
Guests

SEEK "BEAST MAN"

I have not yet forced myself to read the rest.

AUGUST

Weird Tales

25c

• THE STRANGEST STORIES EVER TOLD •

THING OF DARKNESS

a compelling story of a slinking Thing of horror and sinister menace

by G. G. PENDARVES

*Thrills!
Mystery!
Excitement!*

FRANK OWEN

J. PAUL SUTER

EDMOND HAMILTON

LORETTA BURROUGH



The Terrible Parchment*

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

The author describes this as "a Necronomicon story to end all Necronomicon stories"

"**H**ERE'S your WEIRD TALES," smiled my wife, entering the apartment.

"Thanks, Gwen," I said, rising and taking the magazine she held out. "I say, it's surely not the first of the month."

"Not for two days yet," Gwen assured me. "But, just as I came to the front door, a funny old man bobbed up with an armful of magazines—advance copies, I guess. He stuck a copy of W. T. right under my nose. I gave him a quarter and—oop!"

I had opened the magazine, and a page fluttered to the floor. We both stooped for it, both seized it, and we both let go.

Gwen gasped and I whistled. For that fallen page had such a clammy, wet feel to it. *Dank* is the word, I should think. Still stooping, we frowned mystifiedly at each other. Then I conquered my momentary disgust, took hold of it again, and lifted it into the light of my desk lamp.

"It's not paper," Gwen said at once.

No more it was, and what could it be doing in WEIRD TALES?—though it looked weird enough, in all conscience. It was a rectangle of tawny, limp parchment, grained on the upper side with scales, like the skin of some unfamiliar reptile. I turned it over, revealing a smoother surface with pore-like markings and lines of faint, rusty scribbling.

"Arabic," I pronounced at once. "Let's phone for Kline to come over; he reads the stuff."

"There's one Greek word," Gwen pointed out. Her pink-tipped forefinger touched the string of capital letters at the upper edge:

NEKPONOMIKON

"*Necronomicon*," she spelled out. "That P would be the letter *rho* in Greek. *Necronomicon*—sounds woogey, what?"

"That's the name of H. P. Lovecraft's book," I told her.

"Lovecraft's book? Oh, yes, I remember. He's always mentioning it in his stories."

"And lots of W. T. authors—Clark Ashton Smith and Robert Bloch and so on—have taken it up," I added.

"But Lovecraft imagined the thing, didn't he?"

I laid the parchment on the desk, for my fingers still rebelled at its strange dankness. "Yes, Lovecraft imagined it. Describes it as the work of a mad Arab wizard, Abdul Alhazred, and it's supposed to contain secrets of powerful evils that existed before the modern world. It's already become legendary."

Again my wife touched the thing, very gingerly. "But what's it for? Some sort of valentine or April Fool joke, stuck in to thrill the subscribers? If so, it's cleverly made—looks a million years old."

We pored over the rusty-looking scrawl of Arabic, our heads close together. It must be a fake, we agreed, yet there was every appearance of age-old fadedness about the ink.

* To the memory of H. P. Lovecraft, with all admiration.

"Kline must come over and have a look at it," I reiterated. "He may give some clue as to where it's from, and what it was doing in WEIRD TALES."

Gwen was studying the last line of characters.

"This part isn't faked," she said suddenly. "Look, the ink is fresh—almost wet. And it's not Arabic, it's Latin." She paused a moment, slowly translating in her mind. "It says, 'Chant out the spell, and give me life again.'" She straightened up. "How about a spot of cribbage?"

We both sighed with genuine relief as we turned our backs on the parchment. Light as had been our talk, we had been somehow daunted by the sense of mystery that had ridden in upon us. I got the board and the cards and we began to play on the dining-table.

Ten minutes later I turned suddenly, as if a noise had come to my mind's ear, and gazed at the desk. The parchment was no longer there.

"Look," cried Gwen. "It's blown off on the floor."

I rose and picked it up. It felt even more unpleasant than before, and this time it seemed to wriggle in my hand. Perhaps a draft stirred it, but I could detect no draft. Dropping it back on the desk, I weighted it with an ash-tray and went back to the game.

Gwen beat me soundly, adding to her household money thereby. I taunted her with suggestions of a girlhood misspent at gaming-tables, then turned idly to the desk once more.

The rectangle of parchment was *beside* the ash-tray, not *under* it, and—that undetectable draft again!—was sliding ever so deliberately toward the edge of the desk. I swore, or so Gwen insists, and fairly jumped over to seize it.

"This is getting ridiculous," Gwen pro-

tested, fumbling nervously with the cards on the table.

I was studying the thing again. "I thought you said the last line was in Latin," I remarked.

"Why, so it is."

"No, it's in English." I read it aloud: "'Chant out the spell, and give me life again.' Hello, the next to the last line is in English, too."

It also was written with fresh ink and in a bold hand:

"Many minds and many wishes give substance to the worship of Chthulhu."

GWEN had come to look over my shoulder. "By heaven, dear, you're right. 'Many minds and——' But what does Chthulhu mean? Does it have anything to do with the chthonian gods—the underworld rulers that the ancient Greeks served in fear?"

"I shouldn't be surprized," I replied, and it sounded even drier than I had intended. "Chthulhu is a name that Lovecraft and Smith and the others used in their yarns. He's a god of old time, they tell us, and a rank bad one at that."

She shuddered, but gamely turned the shudder into a toss of her shoulders. "I suppose," she hazarded, "that the 'many minds and wishes' have given substance to this page of the *Necronomicon*."

"Nonsense, the *Necronomicon*'s only something in Lovecraft's stories."

"Didn't you just say that it had become a legend among readers of weird fiction?" she reminded, utterly serious. "What's the next step after that?"

"What you're trying to suggest," I said, trying to be gayly scornful, "is that so many people have thought and talked about Lovecraft's book that they've actually given it substance."

"Something like that," she nodded thoughtfully. Then, more brightly: "Oh,

it'll turn out to be a joke or something else anticlimactic."

"Right," I agreed readily. "After all, we're not living in a weird tale, you know."

"If we were, that would explain why there was one last line in Latin before, and now two last lines in English." She warmed to the idea. "You see, it was turning deliberately into a language we could read. When we hesitated over the Latin——"

"——it kindly changed into English," I finished.

Again she nodded. "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy."

"Trite but true. Still, my name's not Horatio, and it's bedtime. Let's not dream any philosophies that will turn into nightmare." Once more I picked up that clammy parchment. "As for this creation of many minds or what have you, I'm putting it under stoppages." Opening the big dictionary that lies on a stand beside my desk, I laid the parchment inside and closed the heavy book upon it. "There it stays until we get Kline here tomorrow. And now to bed."

TO BED we went, but not to sleep. Gwen squirmed and muttered, and I was weary in every portion of my body save the eyelids. We got up once for sandwiches and milk, and a second time for aspirin. A third time we lay down, and I, at least, dozed off.

I started awake to the pressure of Gwen's fingers on my shoulder.

"I think——" she began tensely. Then I heard what she had heard, a faint, stealthy rustle.

I reached for the light cord above the bed and gave it a jerk. The room sprang into radiance, and through the open door I could see the parlor. I sat up in bed, staring.

Something hung down from between the leaves of the dictionary by the desk, something that moved even as I made it out. Something that would be rectangular if laid flat, but which was now limper, more flexible than the wettest rag, that seemed to *flow* from its narrow prison like a trickle of fluid filth.

"It's getting away," breathed Gwen almost inaudibly. "It's going to come here for us."

The parchment worked its last corner free and dropped to the floor with a fleshy slap, as though it had soft weight. It began to move across the rug toward the bedroom door. Toward us.

I dare say I might be able to describe painstakingly its appearance as it moved—how it humped up in the middle and laid its corners to the floor like feet. But how can I convey the heart-stopping nastiness of it, how visualize for you the animosity and sense of wicked power that it gave off in waves almost palpable? You might get an idea of how it looked by draping a sheet of brown paper over the back of a creeping turtle . . . no, that sounds ludicrous. There was nothing funny in the way that parchment moved across the carpet toward us, not a single atom of humor.

Gwen had slipped out from under the covers and crouched, all doubled up and panicky, against the headboard. Her helpless terror nerved me to defense. Somehow I got out and stood upright on the floor. I am sure that I looked most unheroic with my rumpled hair and my blue pajamas and my bare feet, but I was ready to do battle.

Yes, do battle with what? And how?

That crawling scrap of parchment had reached the threshold, hunched over the door-sill like a very flat and loathly worm. I could see the writing on it, not rusty and faint but black and heavy. Snatching a water-glass from the bedside table, I

hurled it. The foul thing crumpled suddenly sidewise. The glass splintered to atoms where it had been. Next moment the parchment was humping and creeping faster, almost scampering, toward my bare toes.

"Smash it," Gwen choked out. She must have been ready to faint.

Against a chair close at hand leaned her little parasol, a feminine thing with a silken tassel at its handle and a ferrule of imitation amber. I seized it and made a violent stab at the horrid invader. My point thrust the center of it against the floor, and for a moment I pinned it there.

Then I was able to see in what manner it was changed.

At the top was still the Greek word NEKPONOMIKON in aged ink; but the Arabic writing that had filled the page below was gone, or transformed; transformed into English, written large and bold and black as jet. Stooped as I was above it, I read at a glance the first line.

A thousand times since I have yearned to speak that line aloud, to write it down, to do something that would ease my mind of it. But I must not, now or ever. As it was, the world escaped all too narrowly.

Who shaped so dreadful a thought? Abdul Alhazred is but a figment of Lovecraft's imagination. And Lovecraft is human—he could never have dreamed anything like those words, those words that lie upon my mind, I say, like links of a red-hot iron chain. And they were but the beginning of the writing. What could it have been like in full?

I dare not surmise. But this much I suddenly knew for the truth, as I tried to crush that horribly alive parchment-scrap beneath my inadequate parasol—the formless evil of the centuries had taken form. An author had fancied the book, hundreds of others had given it fuller being by their own mental images. The new-hatched legend had become a slen-

der but fearsome peg on which terror, creeping over the borderland from its own forbidding realm, could hang itself. Once hung there, it could grow tangible, solid, potent.

"Gwen," I warned, "hide your eyes. Don't look. Don't read."

"What do you mean, don't read?" Her pale face moved closer as she leaned across the bed.

"Don't read!" I raved at her. "Remember what you've seen already—'Chant out the spell and give me life again!'"

The parchment slid slowly out from under the down-pressed parasol. I could hold it no easier than if it had been a moist melon seed. It reached my foot—ugh! It was climbing my leg.

What was it up to? Merciful heavens, would it scale my body as a squirrel scales a tree, would it drape itself upon my face and force its unspeakable message into my eyes and my mind? Because then I'd *have* to speak.

The burden of it would be too great. My lips would open to ease the torture. "Chant out the spell"—chant it out, and the world would be crushed again under the fearsome feet of Chthulhu and his brother-horrors of the evil eld. What sins and woes would run loose, at which Satan in hell must hide his shocked face? And it would be I, I, who spoke the words that released them.

I felt faint and dizzy, but I tore the repellent sheathing from my leg. For a moment it clung against my strength, as though with tendrils or suckers. With all my force I dashed it into a metal waste-basket, among crumpled heaps of paper. It tried to flop out again, but I pushed it back with the parasol. At the same time I clutched my cigarette lighter from the bedside table. Thank heaven it worked, it burst into flame. I flung it into the basket.

The whole mass of paper burst into fire and smoke. Up from the midst of it rose a faint, throbbing squeak, to be felt rather than heard, like the voice of a bat far away. Deeper into the little furnace I thrust that outcast messenger from the forces that threatened my world.

The flames worried it, and it crinkled and thrashed as if in agony, but it did not burn. Prodding it back again and again, I must have shouted something in my despair, for Gwen hurried to the telephone and jabbered into it.

"Father O'Neal!" she cried. "Come quick, with holy water!"

Hanging up, she turned to me.

"Is he coming?" I panted.

"Yes, he'll be here in two minutes."

Her voice quavered. "But what if the holy water doesn't work?"

It did work. At the first spatter, the unhallowed page and its prodigious gospel of wickedness vanished into a fluff of ashes. I pray my thankfulness for that, every day that I live. Yet, even as I offer thanks, my troubled mind forms again the question that Gwen asked:

What if the holy water had not worked?



SEPTEMBER

Weird Tales

Satan's Palimpsest

an eery tale of sinister doom

By SEABURY QUINN

CLARK ASHTON SMITH

EDMOND HAMILTON

H. P. LOVECRAFT



The
No. 1 Magazine
of
STRANGE
and
UNUSUAL
Stories

School for the Unspeakable

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Into what frightful horror did young Setwick blunder that night?

BART SETWICK dropped off the train at Carrington and stood for a moment on the station platform, an honest-faced, well-knit lad in tweeds. This little town and its famous school would be his home for the next eight months; but which way to the school? The sun had set, and he could barely see the shop signs across Carrington's modest main street. He hesitated, and a soft voice spoke at his very elbow:

"Are you for the school?"

Startled, Bart Setwick wheeled. In the gray twilight stood another youth, smiling thinly and waiting as if for an answer. The stranger was all of nineteen years old—that meant maturity to young Setwick, who was fifteen—and his pale face had shrewd lines to it. His tall, shambling body was clad in high-necked jersey and unfashionably tight trousers. Bart Setwick skimmed him with the quick, appraising eye of young America.

"I just got here," he replied. "My name's Setwick."

"Mine's Hoag." Out came a slender hand. Setwick took it and found it froggy-cold, with a suggestion of steel-wire muscles. "Glad to meet you. I came down on the chance someone would drop off the train. Let me give you a lift to the school."

Hoag turned away, felinely light for all his ungainliness, and led his new acquaintance around the corner of the little wooden railway station. Behind the structure, half hidden in its shadow,

stood a shabby buggy with a lean bay horse in the shafts.

"Get in," invited Hoag, but Bart Setwick paused for a moment. His generation was not used to such vehicles. Hoag chuckled and said, "Oh, this is only a school wrinkle. We run to funny customs. Get in."

Setwick obeyed. "How about my trunk?"

"Leave it." The taller youth swung himself in beside Setwick and took the reins. "You'll not need it tonight."

He snapped his tongue and the bay horse stirred, drew them around and off down a bush-lined side road. Its hoof-beats were oddly muffled.

They turned a corner, another, and came into open country. The lights of Carrington, newly kindled against the night, hung behind like a constellation settled down to Earth. Setwick felt a hint of chill that did not seem to fit the September evening.

"How far is the school from town?" he asked.

"Four or five miles," Hoag replied in his hushed voice. "That was deliberate on the part of the founders—they wanted to make it hard for the students to get to town for larks. It forced us to dig up our own amusements." The pale face creased in a faint smile, as if this were a pleasantry. "There's just a few of the right sort on hand tonight. By the way, what did you get sent out for?"

Setwick frowned his mystification.

"Why, to go to school. Dad sent me."

"But what for? Don't you know that this is a high-class prison prep? Half of us are lunkheads that need poking along, the other half are fellows who got in scandals somewhere else. Like me." Again Hoag smiled.

Setwick began to dislike his companion. They rolled a mile or so in silence before Hoag again asked a question:

"Do you go to church, Setwick?"

The new boy was afraid to appear priggish, and made a careless show with, "Not very often."

"Can you recite anything from the Bible?" Hoag's soft voice took on an anxious tinge.

"Not that I know of."

"Good," was the almost hearty response. "As I was saying, there's only a few of us at the school tonight—only three, to be exact. And we don't like Bible-quoters."

Setwick laughed, trying to appear sage and cynical. "Isn't Satan reputed to quote the Bible to his own——"

"What do you know about Satan?" interrupted Hoag. He turned full on Setwick, studying him with intent, dark eyes. Then, as if answering his own question: "Little enough, I'll bet. Would you like to know about him?"

"Sure I would," replied Setwick, wondering what the joke would be.

"I'll teach you after a while," Hoag promised cryptically, and silence fell again.

HALF a moon was well up as they came in sight of a dark jumble of buildings.

"Here we are," announced Hoag, and then, throwing back his head, he emitted a wild, wordless howl that made Setwick almost jump out of the buggy. "That's

to let the others know we're coming," he explained. "Listen!"

Back came a seeming echo of the howl, shrill, faint and eery. The horse wavered in its muffled trot, and Hoag clucked it back into step. They turned in at a driveway well grown up in weeds, and two minutes more brought them up to the rear of the closest building. It was dim gray in the wash of moonbeams, with blank inky rectangles for windows. Nowhere was there a light, but as the buggy came to a halt Setwick saw a young head pop out of a window on the lower floor.

"Here already, Hoag?" came a high, reedy voice.

"Yes," answered the youth at the reins, "and I've brought a new man with me."

Thrilling a bit to hear himself called a man, Setwick alighted.

"His name's Setwick," went on Hoag. "Meet Andoff, Setwick. A great friend of mine."

Andoff flourished a hand in greeting and scrambled out over the window-sill. He was chubby and squat and even paler than Hoag, with a low forehead beneath lank, wet-looking hair, and black eyes set wide apart in a fat, stupid-looking face. His shabby jacket was too tight for him, and beneath worn knickers his legs and feet were bare. He might have been an overgrown thirteen or an undeveloped eighteen.

"Felcher ought to be along in half a second," he volunteered.

"Entertain Setwick while I put up the buggy," Hoag directed him.

Andoff nodded, and Hoag gathered the lines in his hands, but paused for a final word.

"No funny business yet, Andoff," he cautioned seriously. "Setwick, don't let this lard-bladder rag you or tell you wild stories until I come back."

Andoff laughed shrilly. "No, no wild

stories," he promised. "You'll do the talking, Hoag."

The buggy trundled away, and Andoff swung his fat, grinning face to the new arrival.

"Here comes Felcher," he announced. "Felcher, meet Setwick."

Another boy had bobbed up, it seemed, from nowhere. Setwick had not seen him come around the corner of the building, or slip out of a door or window. He was probably as old as Hoag, or older, but so small as to be almost a dwarf, and frail to boot. His most notable characteristic was his hairiness. A great mop covered his head, bushed over his neck and ears, and hung unkemptly to his bright, deep-set eyes. His lips and cheeks were spread with a rank down, and a curly thatch peeped through the unbuttoned collar of his soiled white shirt. The hand he offered Setwick was almost simian in its shagginess and in the hardness of its palm. Too, it was cold and damp. Setwick remembered the same thing of Hoag's handclasp.

"We're the only ones here so far," Felcher remarked. His voice, surprisingly deep and strong for so small a creature, rang like a great bell.

"Isn't even the head-master here?" inquired Setwick, and at that the other two began to laugh uproariously, Andoff's fife-squeal rendering an obbligato to Felcher's bell-boom. Hoag, returning, asked what the fun was.

"Setwick asks," groaned Felcher, "why the head-master isn't here to welcome him."

More fife-laughter and bell-laughter.

"I doubt if Setwick would think the answer was funny," Hoag commented, and then chuckled softly himself.

Setwick, who had been well brought up, began to grow nettled.

"Tell me about it," he urged, in what

he hoped was a bleak tone, "and I'll join your chorus of mirth."

Felcher and Andoff gazed at him with eyes strangely eager and yearning. Then they faced Hoag.

"Let's tell him," they both said at once, but Hoag shook his head.

"Not yet. One thing at a time. Let's have the song first."

They began to sing. The first verse of their offering was obscene, with no pretense of humor to redeem it. Setwick had never been squeamish, but he found himself definitely repelled. The second verse seemed less objectionable, but it hardly made sense:

All they tried to teach here
Now goes untaught.
Ready, steady, each here,
Knowledge we sought.
What they called disaster
Killed us not, O master!
Rule us, we beseech here,
Eye, hand and thought.

It was something like a hymn, Setwick decided; but before what altar would such hymns be sung? Hoag must have read that question in his mind.

"You mentioned Satan in the buggy on the way out," he recalled, his knowing face hanging like a mask in the half-dimness close to Setwick. "Well, that was a Satanist song."

"It was? Who made it?"

"I did," Hoag informed him. "How do you like it?"

Setwick made no answer. He tried to sense mockery in Hoag's voice, but could not find it. "What," he asked finally, "does all this Satanist singing have to do with the head-master?"

"A lot," came back Felcher deeply, and "A lot," squealed Andoff.

Hoag gazed from one of his friends to the others, and for the first time he smiled broadly. It gave him a toothy look.

"I believe," he ventured quietly but

weightily, "that we might as well let Setwick in on the secret of our little circle."

HERE it would begin, the new boy decided—the school hazing of which he had heard and read so much. He had anticipated such things with something of excitement, even eagerness, but now he wanted none of them. He did not like his three companions, and he did not like the way they approached whatever it was they intended to do. He moved backward a pace or two, as if to retreat.

Swift as darting birds, Hoag and Andoff closed in at either elbow. Their chill hands clutched him and suddenly he felt light-headed and sick. Things that had been clear in the moonlight went hazy and distorted.

"Come on and sit down, Setwick," invited Hoag, as though from a great distance. His voice did not grow loud or harsh, but it embodied real menace. "Sit on that window-sill. Or would you like us to carry you?"

At the moment Setwick wanted only to be free of their touch, and so he walked unresistingly to the sill and scrambled up on it. Behind him was the blackness of an unknown chamber, and at his knees gathered the three who seemed so eager to tell him their private joke.

"The head-master was a proper church-goer," began Hoag, as though he were the spokesman for the group. "He didn't have any use for devils or devil-worship. Went on record against them when he addressed us in chapel. That was what started us."

"Right," nodded Andoff, turning up his fat, larval face. "Anything he outlawed, we wanted to do. Isn't that logic?"

"Logic and reason," wound up Felcher. His hairy right hand twiddled on the sill near Setwick's thigh. In the

moonlight it looked like a big, nervous spider.

Hoag resumed. "I don't know of any prohibition of his it was easier or more fun to break."

Setwick found that his mouth had gone dry. His tongue could barely moisten his lips. "You mean," he said, "that you began to worship devils?"

Hoag nodded happily, like a teacher at an apt pupil. "One vacation I got a book on the cult. The three of us studied it, then began ceremonies. We learned the charms and spells, forward and backward——"

"They're twice as good backward," put in Felcher, and Andoff giggled.

"Have you any idea, Setwick," Hoag almost cooed, "what it was that appeared in our study the first time we burned wine and sulfur, with the proper words spoken over them?"

Setwick did not want to know. He clenched his teeth. "If you're trying to scare me," he managed to growl out, "it certainly isn't going to work."

All three laughed once more, and began to chatter out their protestations of good faith.

"I swear that we're telling the truth, Setwick," Hoag assured him. "Do you want to hear it, or don't you?"

Setwick had very little choice in the matter, and he realized it. "Oh, go ahead," he capitulated, wondering how it would do to crawl backward from the sill into the darkness of the room.

Hoag leaned toward him, with the air as of one confiding. "The head-master caught us. Caught us red-handed."

"Book open, fire burning," chanted Felcher.

"He had something very fine to say about the vengeance of heaven," Hoag went on. "We got to laughing at him. He worked up a frenzy. Finally he tried to take heaven's vengeance into his own

hands—tried to visit it on us, in a very primitive way. But it didn't work."

Andoff was laughing immoderately, his fat arms across his bent belly.

"He thought it worked," he supplemented between high gurgles, "but it didn't."

"Nobody could kill us," Felcher added. "Not after the oaths we'd taken, and the promises that had been made us."

"What promises?" demanded Setwick, who was struggling hard not to believe. "Who made you any promises?"

"Those we worshipped," Felcher told him. If he was simulating earnestness, it was a supreme bit of acting. Setwick, realizing this, was more daunted than he cared to show.

"When did all these things happen?" was his next question.

"When?" echoed Hoag. "Oh, years and years ago."

"Years and years ago," repeated Andoff.

"Long before you were born," Felcher assured him.

They were standing close together, their backs to the moon that shone in Setwick's face. He could not see their expressions clearly. But their three voices—Hoag's soft, Felcher's deep and vibrant, Andoff's high and squeaky—were absolutely serious.

"I know what you're arguing within yourself," Hoag announced somewhat smugly. "How can we, who talk about those many past years, seem so young? That calls for an explanation, I'll admit." He paused, as if choosing words. "Time—for us—stands still. It came to a halt on that very night, Setwick; the night our head-master tried to put an end to our worship."

"And to us," smirked the gross-bodied Andoff, with his usual air of self-congratulation at capping one of Hoag's statements.

"The worship goes on," pronounced Felcher, in the same chanting manner that he had affected once before. "The worship goes on, and we go on, too."

"Which brings us to the point," Hoag came in briskly. "Do you want to throw in with us, Setwick?—make the fourth of this lively little party?"

"No, I don't," snapped Setwick vehemently.

THEY fell silent, and gave back a little—a trio of bizarre silhouettes against the pale moon-glow. Setwick could see the flash of their staring eyes among the shadows of their faces. He knew that he was afraid, but hid his fear. Pluckily he dropped from the sill to the ground. Dew from the grass spattered his sock-clad ankles between oxfords and trouser-cuffs.

"I guess it's my turn to talk," he told them levelly. "I'll make it short. I don't like you, nor anything you've said. And I'm getting out of here."

"We won't let you," said Hoag, hushed but emphatic.

"We won't let you," murmured Andoff and Felcher together, as though they had rehearsed it a thousand times.

Setwick clenched his fists. His father had taught him to box. He took a quick, smooth stride toward Hoag and hit him hard in the face. Next moment all three had flung themselves upon him. They did not seem to strike or grapple or tug, but he went down under their assault. The shoulders of his tweed coat wallowed in sand, and he smelled crushed weeds. Hoag, on top of him, pinioned his arms with a knee on each biceps. Felcher and Andoff were stooping close.

Glaring up in helpless rage, Setwick knew once and for all that this was no schoolboy prank. Never did practical jokers gather around their victim with

such staring, green-gleaming eyes, such drawn jowls, such quivering lips.

Hoag bared white fangs. His pointed tongue quested once over them.

"Knife!" he muttered, and Felcher fumbled in a pocket, then passed him something that sparkled in the moon-light.

Hoag's lean hand reached for it, then whipped back. Hoag had lifted his eyes to something beyond the huddle. He choked and whimpered inarticulately, sprang up from Setwick's laboring chest, and fell back in awkward haste. The others followed his shocked stare, then as suddenly cowered and retreated in turn.

"It's the master!" wailed Andoff.

"Yes," roared a gruff new voice. "Your old head-master—and I've come back to master *you*!"

Rising upon one elbow, the prostrate Setwick saw what they had seen—a tall, thick-bodied figure in a long dark coat, topped with a square, distorted face and a tousel of white locks. Its eyes glittered with their own pale, hard light. As it advanced slowly and heavily it emitted a snigger of murderous joy. Even at first glance Setwick was aware that it cast no shadow.

"I am in time," mouthed the newcomer. "You were going to kill this poor boy."

Hoag had recovered and made a stand. "Kill him?" he quavered, seeming to fawn before the threatening presence. "No. We'd have given him life——"

"You call it life?" trumpeted the long-coated one. "You'd have sucked out his blood to teem your own dead veins, damned him to your filthy condition. But I'm here to prevent you!"

A finger pointed, huge and knuckly, and then came a torrent of language. To the nerve-stunned Setwick it sounded like a bit from the New Testament, or perhaps from the Book of Common Prayer.

All at once he remembered Hoag's avowed dislike for such quotations.

His three erstwhile assailants reeled as if before a high wind that chilled or scorched. "No, no! Don't!" they begged wretchedly.

The square old face gaped open and spewed merciless laughter. The knuckly finger traced a cross in the air, and the trio wailed in chorus as though the sign had been drawn upon their flesh with a tongue of flame.

Hoag dropped to his knees. "Don't!" he sobbed.

"I have power," mocked their tormenter. "During years shut up I won it, and now I'll use it." Again a triumphant burst of mirth. "I know you're damned and can't be killed, but you can be tortured! I'll make you crawl like worms before I'm done with you!"

Setwick gained his shaky feet. The long coat and the blocky head leaned toward him.

"Run, you!" dinned a rough roar in his ears. "Get out of here—and thank God for the chance!"

SETWICK ran, staggering. He blundered through the weeds of the driveway, gained the road beyond. In the distance gleamed the lights of Carrington. As he turned his face toward them and quickened his pace he began to weep, chokingly, hysterically, exhaustingly.

He did not stop running until he reached the platform in front of the station. A clock across the street struck ten, in a deep voice not unlike Felcher's. Setwick breathed deeply, fished out his handkerchief and mopped his face. His hand was quivering like a grass stalk in a breeze.

"Beg pardon!" came a cheery hail. "You must be Setwick."

As once before on this same platform he whirled around with startled speed

Within touch of him stood a broad-shouldered man of thirty or so, with horn-rimmed spectacles. He wore a neat Norfolk jacket and flannels. A short briar pipe was clamped in a good-humored mouth.

"I'm Collins, one of the masters at the school," he introduced himself. "If you're Setwick, you've had us worried. We expected you on that seven o'clock train, you know. I dropped down to see if I couldn't trace you."

Setwick found a little of his lost wind. "But I've—been to the school," he

mumbled protestingly. His hand, still trembling, gestured vaguely along the way he had come.

Collins threw back his head and laughed, then apologized.

"Sorry," he said. "It's no joke if you really had all that walk for nothing. Why, that old place is deserted—used to be a catch-all for incorrigible rich boys. They closed it about fifty years ago, when the head-master went mad and killed three of his pupils. As a matter of coincidence, the master himself died just this afternoon, in the state hospital for the insane."

H. P. L.

By HENRY KUTTNER

Here in the silent places, and the caverns beneath the world,
On the great black altars carven from the stones that the gods have hurled,
Where the gray smoke coils and shudders through the eery purple gleam,
And the shadows of worlds beyond our worlds fall over a dreamer's dream—
Reddened with blood from an alien flesh, pallid as vampire thing,
Dark with the glimpse of supernal night and brushed with an ebon wing,
Pageants of awful majesty pass in a saraband
Like the shadows of Egypt's Titan gods far-flung on the changeless sand.

Only a few may taste the cup that none but the gods can drain;
Valhalla is lost to the stolid throng of the peaceful and warm and sane;
Evil, they say, is the lonely night where it is not good to be,
Chilled with the cold that is more than cold, paying the dreamer's fee,
Resting on couches of asphodel, resting and wonder-drowned,
Ageless and lost to a humdrum world, with magic and glory crowned,
Facing the gates of the universe, breasting the mighty stream
That bursts from the roots of Yggdrasil, in the splendor of a dream.

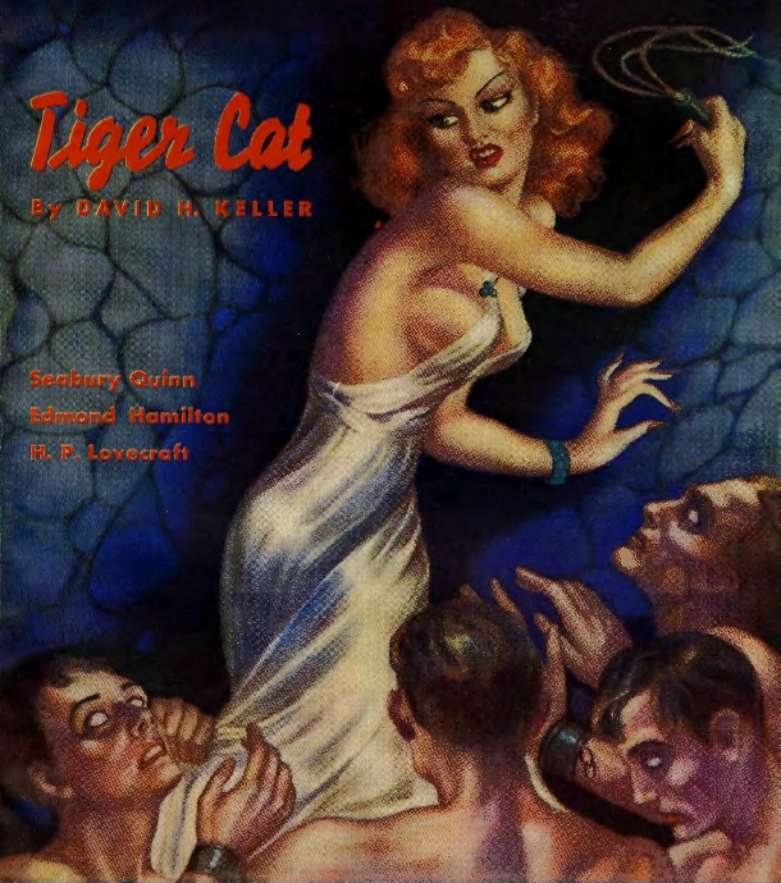
WEIRD TALES

OCTOBER

Tiger Cat

By DAVID H. KELLER

Seabury Quinn
Edmond Hamilton
H. P. Lovecraft



The Golgotha Dancers

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

A curious and terrifying story about an artist who sold his soul that he might paint a living picture

I HAD come to the Art Museum to see the special show of Goya prints, but that particular gallery was so crowded that I could hardly get in, much less see or savor anything; wherefore I walked out again. I wandered through the other wings with their rows and rows of oils, their Greek and Roman sculptures, their stern ranks of medieval armors, their Oriental porcelains, their Egyptian gods. At length, by chance and not by design, I came to the head of a certain rear stairway. Other habitués of the museum will know the one I mean when I remind them that Arnold Böcklin's *The Isle of the Dead* hangs on the wall of the landing.

I started down, relishing in advance the impression Böcklin's picture would make with its high brown rocks and black poplars, its midnight sky and gloomy film of sea, its single white figure erect in the bow of the beach-nosing skiff. But, as I descended, I saw that *The Isle of the Dead* was not in its accustomed position on the wall. In that space, arresting even in the bad light and from the up-angle of the stairs, hung a gilt-framed painting I had never seen or heard of in all my museum-haunting years.

I gazed at it, one will imagine, all the way down to the landing. Then I had a close, searching look, and a final appraising stare from the lip of the landing above the lower half of the flight. So far as I can learn—and I have been diligent in my research—the thing is unknown

even to the best-informed of art experts. Perhaps it is as well that I describe it in detail.

It seemed to represent action upon a small plateau or table rock, drab and bare, with a twilight sky deepening into a starless evening. This setting, restrainedly worked up in blue-grays and blue-blacks, was not the first thing to catch the eye, however. The front of the picture was filled with lively dancing creatures, as pink, plump and naked as cherubs and as patently evil as the meditations of Satan in his rare idle moments.

I counted those dancers. There were twelve of them, ranged in a half-circle, and they were cavorting in evident glee around a central object—a prone cross, which appeared to be made of two stout logs with some of the bark still upon them. To this cross a pair of the pink things—that makes fourteen—kneeling and swinging blocky-looking hammers or mauls, spiked a human figure.

I say *human* when I speak of that figure, and I withhold the word in describing the dancers and their hammer-wielding fellows. There is a reason. The supine victim on the cross was a beautifully represented male body, as clear and anatomically correct as an illustration in a surgical textbook. The head was writhed around, as if in pain, and I could not see the face or its expression; but in the tortured tenseness of the muscles, in the slaty white sheen of the skin with jagged streaks of vivid gore upon it, agonized nature was plain and doubly plain. I

could almost see the painted limbs writhe against the transfixing nails.

By the same token, the dancers and hammerers were so dynamically done as to seem half in motion before my eyes. So much for the sound skill of the painter. Yet, where the crucified prisoner was all clarity, these others were all fog. No lines, no angles, no muscles—their features could not be seen or sensed. I was not even sure if they had hair or not. It was as if each was picked out with a ray of light in that surrounding dusk, light that revealed and yet shimmered indistinctly; light, too, that had absolutely nothing of comfort or honesty in it.

"**H**OLD on, there!" came a sharp challenge from the stairs behind and below me. "What are you doing? And what's that picture doing?"

I started so that I almost lost my footing and fell upon the speaker—one of the Museum guards. He was a slight old fellow and his thin hair was gray, but he advanced upon me with all the righteous, angry pluck of a beefy policeman. His attitude surprised and nettled me.

"I was going to ask somebody that same question," I told him as austerely as I could manage. "What about this picture? I thought there was a Böcklin hanging here."

The guard relaxed his forbidding attitude at first sound of my voice. "Oh, I beg your pardon, sir. I thought you were somebody else—the man who brought that thing." He nodded at the picture, and the hostile glare came back into his eyes. "It so happened that he talked to me first, then to the curator. Said it was art—great art—and the Museum must have it." He lifted his shoulders, in a shrug or a shudder. "Personally, I think it's plain beastly."

So it was, I grew aware as I looked at

it again. "And the Museum has accepted it at last?" I prompted.

He shook his head. "Oh, no, sir. An hour ago he was at the back door, with that nasty daub there under his arm. I heard part of the argument. He got insulting, and he was told to clear out and take his picture with him. But he must have got in here somehow, and hung it himself." Walking close to the painting, as gingerly as though he expected the pink dancers to leap out at him, he pointed to the lower edge of the frame. "If it was a real Museum piece, we'd have a plate right there, with the name of the painter and the title."

I, too, came close. There was no plate, just as the guard had said. But in the lower left-hand corner of the canvas were sprawling capitals, pale paint on the dark, spelling out the word *GOLGOTHA*. Beneath these, in small, barely readable script:

I sold my soul that I might paint a living picture.

No signature or other clue to the artist's identity.

The guard had discovered a great framed rectangle against the wall to one side. "Here's the picture he took down," he informed me, highly relieved. "Help me put it back, will you, sir? And do you suppose," here he grew almost wistful, "that we could get rid of this other thing before someone finds I let the crazy fool-slip past me?"

I took one edge of *The Isle of the Dead* and lifted it to help him hang it once more.

"Tell you what," I offered on sudden impulse; "I'll take this *Golgotha* piece home with me, if you like."

"Would you do that?" he almost yelled out in his joy at the suggestion. "Would you, to oblige me?"

"To oblige myself," I returned. "I need another picture at my place."

And the upshot of it was, he smuggled me and the unwanted painting out of the Museum. Never mind how. I have done quite enough as it is to jeopardize his job and my own welcome up there.

IT WAS not until I had paid off my taxi and lugged the unwieldy parallelogram of canvas and wood upstairs to my bachelor apartment that I bothered to wonder if it might be valuable. I never did find out, but from the first I was deeply impressed.

Hung over my own fireplace, it looked as large and living as a scene glimpsed through a window or, perhaps, on a stage in a theater. The capering pink bodies caught new lights from my lamp, lights that glossed and intensified their shape and color but did not reveal any new details. I pored once more over the cryptic legend; *I sold my soul that I might paint a living picture.*

A living picture—was it that? I could not answer. For all my honest delight in such things, I cannot be called expert or even knowing as regards art. Did I even like the Golgotha painting? I could not be sure of that, either. And the rest of the inscription, about selling a soul; I was considerably intrigued by that, and let my thoughts ramble on the subject of Satanist complexes and the vagaries of half-crazy painters. As I read, that evening, I glanced up again and again at my new possession. Sometimes it seemed ridiculous, sometimes sinister. Shortly after midnight I rose, gazed once more, and then turned out the parlor lamp. For a moment, or so it seemed, I could see those dancers, so many dim-pink silhouettes in the sudden darkness. I went to the kitchen for a bit of whisky and water, and thence to my bedroom.

I had dreams. In them I was a boy again, and my mother and sister were

leaving the house to go to a theater where—think of it!—Richard Mansfield would play *Beau Brummell*. I, the youngest, was told to stay at home and mind the troublesome furnace. I wept copiously in my disappointed loneliness, and then Mansfield himself stalked in, in full Brummell regalia. He laughed goldenly and stretched out his hand in warm greeting. I, the lad of my dreams, put out my own hand, then was frightened when he would not loosen his grasp. I tugged, and he laughed again. The gold of his laughter turned suddenly hard, cold. I tugged with all my strength, and woke.

Something held me tight by the wrist.

In my first half-moment of wakefulness I was aware that the room was filled with the pink dancers of the picture, in nimble, fierce-happy motion. They were man-size, too, or nearly so, visible in the dark with the dim radiance of fox-fire. On the small scale of the painting they had seemed no more than babyishly plump; now they were gross, like huge erect toads. And, as I awakened fully, they were closing in, a menacing ring of them, around my bed. One stood at my right side, and its grip, clumsy and rubbery-hard like that of a monkey, was closed upon my arm.

I saw and sensed all this, as I say, in a single moment. With the sensing came the realization of peril, so great that I did not stop to wonder at the uncanniness of my visitors. I tried frantically to jerk loose. For the moment I did not succeed and as I thrashed about, throwing my body nearly across the bed, a second dancer dashed in from the left. It seized and clamped my other arm. I felt, rather than heard, a wave of soft, wordless merriment from them all. My heart and sinews seemed to fail, and briefly I lay still in a daze of horror, pinned down crucifix-fashion between my two captors.

Was that a *hammer* raised above me as I sprawled?

There rushed and swelled into me the sudden startled strength that sometimes favors the desperate. I screamed like any wild thing caught in a trap, rolled somehow out of bed and to my feet. One of the beings I shook off and the other I dashed against the bureau. Freed, I made for the bedroom door and the front of the apartment, stumbling and staggering on fear-weakened legs.

One of the dim-shining pink things barred my way at the very threshold, and the others were closing in behind, as if for a sudden rush. I flung my right fist with all my strength and weight. The being bobbed back unresistingly before my smash, like a rubber toy floating through water. I plunged past, reached the entry and fumbled for the knob of the outer door.

They were all about me then, their rubbery palms fumbling at my shoulders, my elbows, my pajama jacket. They would have dragged me down before I could negotiate the lock. A racking shudder possessed me and seemed to flick them clear. Then I stumbled against a stand, and purely by good luck my hand fell upon a bamboo walking-stick. I yelled again, in truly hysterical fierceness, and laid about me as with a whip. My blows did little or no damage to those unearthly assailants, but they shrank back, teetering and dancing, to a safe distance. Again I had the sense that they were laughing, mocking. For the moment I had beaten them off, but they were sure of me in the end. Just then my groping free hand pressed a switch. The entry sprang into light.

On the instant they were not there.

SOMEBODY was knocking outside, and with trembling fingers I turned the knob of the door. In came a tall, slender

girl with a blue lounging-robe caught hurriedly around her. Her bright hair was disordered as though she had just sprung from her bed.

"Is someone sick?" she asked in a breathless voice. "I live down the hall—I heard cries." Her round blue eyes were studying my face, which must have been ghastly pale. "You see, I'm a trained nurse, and perhaps——"

"Thank God you did come!" I broke in, unceremoniously but honestly, and went before her to turn on every lamp in the parlor.

It was she who, without guidance, searched out my whisky and siphon and mixed for me a highball of grateful strength. My teeth rang nervously on the edge of the glass as I gulped it down. After that I got my own robe—a becoming one, with satin facings—and sat with her on the divan to tell of my adventure. When I had finished, she gazed long at the painting of the dancers, then back at me. Her eyes, like two chips of the April sky, were full of concern and she held her rosy lower lip between her teeth. I thought that she was wonderfully pretty.

"What a perfectly terrible nightmare!" she said.

"It was no nightmare," I protested.

She smiled and argued the point, telling me all manner of comforting things about mental associations and their reflections in vivid dreams.

To clinch her point she turned to the painting.

"This line about a 'living picture' is the peg on which your slumbering mind hung the whole fabric," she suggested, her slender fingertip touching the painted scribble. "Your very literal subconscious self didn't understand that the artist meant his picture would live only figuratively."

"Are you sure that's what the artist meant?" I asked, but finally I let her con-

vince me. One can imagine how badly I wanted to be convinced.

She mixed me another highball, and a short one for herself. Over it she told me her name—Miss Dolby—and finally she left me with a last comforting assurance. But, nightmare or no, I did not sleep again that night. I sat in the parlor among the lamps, smoking and dipping into book after book. Countless times I felt my gaze drawn back to the painting over the fireplace, with the cross and the nail-pierced wretch and the shimmering pink dancers.

After the rising sun had filled the apartment with its honest light and cheer I felt considerably calmer. I slept all morning, and in the afternoon was disposed to agree with Miss Dolby that the whole business had been a bad dream, nothing more. Dressing, I went down the hall, knocked on her door and invited her to dinner with me.

It was a good dinner. Afterward we went to an amusing motion picture, with Charles Butterworth in it as I remember. After bidding her good-night, I went to my own place. Undressed and in bed, I lay awake. My late morning slumber made my eyes slow to close. Thus it was that I heard the faint shuffle of feet and, sitting up against my pillows, saw the glowing silhouettes of the Golgotha dancers. Alive and magnified, they were creeping into my bedroom.

I did not hesitate or shrink this time. I sprang up, tense and defiant.

"No, you don't!" I yelled at them. As they seemed to hesitate before the impact of my wild voice, I charged frantically. For a moment I scattered them and got through the bedroom door, as on the previous night. There was another shindy in the entry; this time they all got hold of me, like a pack of hounds, and wrestled me back against the wall. I writhe even now when I think of the unearthly

hardness of their little gripping paws. Two on each arm were spread-eagling me upon the plaster. The cruciform position again!

I swore, yelled and kicked. One of them was in the way of my foot. He floated back, unhurt. That was their strength and horror—their ability to go flabby and non-resistant under smashing, flattening blows. Something tickled my palm, pricked it. The point of a spike. . . .

"Miss Dolby!" I shrieked, as a child might call for its mother. "Help! Miss D——"

The door flew open; I must not have locked it. "Here I am," came her unafraid reply.

She was outlined against the rectangle of light from the hall. My assailants let go of me to dance toward her. She gasped but did not scream. I staggered along the wall, touched a light-switch, and the parlor just beyond us flared into visibility. Miss Dolby and I ran in to the lamp, rallying there as stone-age folk must have rallied at their fire to face the monsters of the night. I looked at her; she was still fully dressed, as I had left her, apparently had been sitting up. Her rouge made flat patches on her pale cheeks, but her eyes were level.

THIS time the dancers did not retreat or vanish; they lurked in the comparative gloom of the entry, jiggling and trembling as if mustering their powers and resolutions for another rush at us.

"You see," I chattered out to her, "it wasn't a nightmare."

She spoke, not in reply, but as if to herself. "They have no faces," she whispered. "No faces!" In the half-light that was diffused upon them from our lamp they presented the featurelessness of so many huge gingerbread boys, covered with pink icing. One of them, some kind

of leader, pressed forward within the circle of the light. It daunted him a bit. He hesitated, but did not retreat.

From my center table Miss Dolby had picked up a bright paper-cutter. She poised it with the assurance of one who knows how to handle cutting instruments.

"When they come," she said steadily, "let's stand close together. We'll be harder to drag down that way."

I wanted to shout my admiration of her fearless front toward the dreadful beings, my thankfulness for her quick run to my rescue. All I could mumble was, "You're mighty brave."

She turned for a moment to look at the picture above my dying fire. My eyes followed hers. I think I expected to see a blank canvas—find that the painted dancers had vanished from it and had grown into the living ones. But they were still in the picture, and the cross and the victim were there, too. Miss Dolby read aloud the inscription:

"*A living picture . . .* The artist knew what he was talking about, after all."

"Couldn't a living picture be killed?" I wondered.

It sounded uncertain, and a childish quibble to boot, but Miss Dolby exclaimed triumphantly, as at an inspiration.

"Killed? Yes!" she shouted. She sprang at the picture, darting out with the paper-cutter. The point ripped into one of the central figures in the dancing semicircle.

All the crowd in the entry seemed to give a concerted throb, as of startled protest. I swung, heart racing, to front them again. What had happened? Something had changed, I saw. The intrepid leader had vanished. No, he had not drawn back into the group. He had vanished.

Miss Dolby, too, had seen. She struck again, gashed the painted representation of another dancer. And this time the

vanishing happened before my eyes, a creature at the rear of the group went out of existence as suddenly and completely as though a light had blinked out.

The others, driven by their danger, rushed.

I met them, feet planted. I tried to embrace them all at once, went over backward under them. I struck, wrenched, tore. I think I even bit something grisly and bloodless, like fungoid tissue, but I refuse to remember for certain. One or two of the forms struggled past me and grappled Miss Dolby. I struggled to my feet and pulled them back from her. There were not so many swarming after me now. I fought hard before they got me down again. And Miss Dolby kept tearing and stabbing at the canvas—again, again. Clutches melted from my throat, my arms. There were only two dancers left. I flung them back and rose. Only one left. Then none.

They were gone, gone into nowhere.

"That did it," said Miss Dolby breathlessly.

She had pulled the picture down. It was only a frame now, with ragged ribbons of canvas dangling from it.

I snatched it out of her hands and threw it upon the coals of the fire.

"Look," I urged her joyfully. "It's burning! That's the end. Do you see?"

"Yes, I see," she answered slowly. "Some fiend-ridden artist—his evil genius brought it to life."

"The inscription is the literal truth, then?" I supplied.

"Truth no more." She bent to watch the burning. "As the painted figures were destroyed, their incarnations faded."

We said nothing further, but sat down together and gazed as the flames ate the last thread of fabric, the last splinter of wood. Finally we looked up again and smiled at each other.

All at once I knew that I loved her.

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The Witch's Mark

By
DOROTHY QUICK

Seabury Quinn

Edmond Hamilton

Vennette Herron



"Something pale and cloudy was making itself visible."

The Hairy Ones Shall Dance

By GANS T. FIELD

'A novel of a hideous, stark horror that struck during a spirit séance—a tale of terror and sudden death, and the frightful thing that laired in the Devil's Croft

FOREWORD

TO WHOM It May Concern:

Few words are best, as Sir Philip Sidney once wrote in challenging an enemy. The present account will be accepted as a challenge by the

vast army of skeptics of which I once made one. Therefore I write it brief and bald. If my story seems unsteady in spots, that is because the hand that writes it still quivers from my recent ordeal.

Shifting the metaphor from duello to military engagement, this is but the first

gun of the bombardment. Even now sworn statements are being prepared by all others who survived the strange and, in some degree, unthinkable adventure I am recounting. After that, every great psychic investigator in the country, as well as some from Europe, will begin researches. I wish that my friends and brother-magicians, Houdini and Thurston, had lived to bear a hand in them.

I must apologize for the strong admixture of the personal element in my narrative. Some may feel that I err against good taste. My humble argument is that I was not merely an observer, but an actor, albeit a clumsy one, throughout the drama.

As to the setting forth of matters which many will call impossible, let me smile in advance. Things happen and have always happened, that defy the narrow science of test-tube and formula. I can only say again that I am writing the truth, and that my statement will be supported by my companions in the adventure.

TALBOT WILLS.

November 15, 1937.

1. *"Why Must the Burden of Proof Rest with the Spirits?"*

"YOU don't believe in psychic phenomena," said Doctor Otto Zoberg yet again, "because you won't."

This with studied kindness, sitting in the most comfortable chair of my hotel room. I, at thirty-four, silently hoped I would have his health and charm at fifty-four—he was so rugged for all his lean length, so well groomed for all his tweeds and beard and joined eyebrows, so articulate for all his accent. Doctor Zoberg quite apparently liked and admired me, and I felt guilty once more that I did not entirely return the compliment.

"I know that you are a stage magician——" he began afresh.

"I was once," I amended, a little sulkily. My early career had brought me considerable money and notice, but after the novelty of show business was worn off I had never rejoiced in it. Talboto the Mysterious—it had been impressive, but tawdry. Better to be Talbot Wills, lecturer and investigator in the field of exposing fraudulent mediums.

For six years I had known Doctor Otto Zoberg, the champion of spiritism and mediumism, as rival and companion. We had first met in debate under auspices of the Society for Psychical Research in London. I, young enough for enthusiasm but also for carelessness, had been badly out-thought and out-talked. But afterward, Doctor Zoberg had praised my arguments and my delivery, and had graciously taken me out to a late supper. The following day, there arrived from him a present of helpful books and magazines. Our next platform duel found me in a position to get a little of my own back; and he, afterward, laughingly congratulated me on turning to account the material he had sent me. After that, we were public foemen and personal inseparables. Just now we were touring the United States, debating, giving exhibitions, visiting mediums. The night's program, before a Washington audience liberally laced with high officials, had ended in what we agreed was a draw; and here we were, squabbling good-naturedly afterward.

"Please, Doctor," I begged, offering him a cigarette, "save your charges of stubbornness for the theater."

He waved my case aside and bit the end from a villainous black cheroot. "I wouldn't say it, here or in public, if it weren't true, Talbot. Yet you sneer even at telepathy, and only half believe in

mental suggestion. *Ach*, you are worse than Houdini."

"Houdini was absolutely sincere," I almost blazed, for I had known and worshipped that brilliant and kindly prince of conjurers and fraud-finders.

"*Ach*, to be sure, to be sure," nodded Zoberg over his blazing match. "I did not say he was not. Yet, he refused proof—the proof that he himself embodied. Houdini was a great mystic, a medium. His power for miracles he did not know himself."

I had heard that before, from Conan Doyle as well as Zoberg, but I made no comment. Zoberg continued:

"Perhaps Houdini was afraid—if anything could frighten so brave and wise a man it would assuredly come from within. And so he would not even listen to argument." He turned suddenly somber. "Perhaps he knew best, *ja*. But he was stubborn, and so are you."

"I don't think you can say that of me," I objected once more. The cheroot was alight now, and I kindled a cigarette to combat in some degree the gunpowdery fumes.

Teeth gleamed amiably through the beard, and Zoberg nodded again, in frank delight this time. "Oh, we have hopes of you, Wills, where we gave up Houdini."

He had never said that before, not so plainly at any rate. I smiled back. "I've always been willing to be shown. Give me a fool-proof, fake-proof, supernormal phenomenon, Doctor; let me convince myself; then I'll come gladly into the spiritist camp."

"*Ach*, so you always say!" he exploded, but without genuine wrath. "Why must the burden of proof rest with the spirits? How can you prove that they do not live and move and act? Study what Eddington has to say about that."

"For five years," I reminded him, "I

have offered a prize of five thousand dollars to any medium whose spirit miracles I could not duplicate by honest sleight-of-hand."

He gestured with slim fingers, as though to push the words back into me. "That proves absolutely nothing, Wills. For all your skill, do you think that sleight-of-hand can be the only way? Is it even the best way?"

"I've unmasked famous mediums for years, at the rate of one a month," I flung back. "Unmasked them as the clumsiest of fakes."

"Because some are dishonest, are all dishonest?" he appealed. "What specific thing would convince you, my friend?"

I thought for a moment, gazing at him through the billows of smoke. Not a gray hair to him—and I, twenty years his junior, had six or eight at either temple. I went on to admire and even to envy that pointed trowel of beard, the sort of thing that I, a magician, might have cultivated once. Then I made my answer.

"I'd ask for a materialization, Doctor. An ectoplasmic apparition, visible and solid to touch—in an empty room with no curtains or closets, all entrances sealed by myself, the medium and witnesses shackled." He started to open his mouth, but I hurried to prevent him. "I know what you'll say—that I've seen a number of impressive ectoplasms. So I have, perhaps, but not one was scientifically and dispassionately controlled. No, Doctor, if I'm to be convinced, I must make the conditions and set the stage myself."

"And if the materialization was a complete success?"

"Then it would prove the claim to me—to the world. Materializations are the most important question in the whole field."

He looked long at me, narrowing his shrewd eyes beneath the dark single bar of his brows. "Wills," he said at length,

"I hoped you would ask something like this."

"You did?"

"Ja. Because—first, can you spare a day or so?"

I replied guardedly, "I can, I believe. We have two weeks or more before the New Orleans date." I computed rapidly. "Yes, that's December 8. What have you got up your sleeve, Doctor?"

He grinned once more, with a great display of gleaming white teeth, and flung out his long arms. "My sleeves, you will observe, are empty!" he cried. "No trickery. But within five hours of where we sit—five hours by fast automobile—is a little town. And in that town there is a little medium. No, Wills, you have never seen or heard of her. It is only myself who found her by chance, who studied her long and prayerfully. Come with me, Wills—she will teach you how little you know and how much you can learn!"

2. *"You Can Almost Hear the Ghosts."*

I HAVE sat down with the purpose of writing out, plainly and even flatly, all that happened to me and to Doctor Otto Zoberg in our impromptu adventure at psychic investigation; yet, almost at the start, I find it necessary to be vague about the tiny town where that adventure ran its course. Zoberg began by refusing to tell me its name, and now my friends of various psychical research committees have asked me to hold my peace until they have finished certain examinations without benefit of yellow journals or prying politicians.

It is located, as Zoberg told me, within five miles by fast automobile of Washington. On the following morning, after a quick and early breakfast, we departed at seven o'clock in my sturdy coupé. I drove and Zoberg guided. In the

turtle-back we had stowed bags, for the November sky had begun to boil up with dark, heavy clouds, and a storm might delay us.

On the way Zoberg talked a great deal, with his usual charm and animation. He scoffed at my skepticism and prophesied my conversion before another midnight.

"A hundred years ago, realists like yourself were ridiculing hypnotism," he chuckled. "They thought that it was a fantastic fake, like one of Edgar Poe's amusing tales, *ja?* And now it is a great science, for healing and comforting the world. A few years ago, the world scorned mental telepathy——"

"Hold on," I interrupted. "I'm none too convinced of it now."

"I said just that, last night. However, you think that there is some grain of truth to it. You would be a fool to laugh at the many experiments in clairvoyance carried on at Duke University."

"Yes, they are impressive," I admitted.

"They are tremendous, and by no means unique," he insisted. "Think of a number between one and ten," he said suddenly.

I gazed at my hands on the wheel, thought of a joking reply, then fell in with his mood.

"All right," I replied. "I'm thinking of a number. What is it?"

"It is seven," he cried out at once, then laughed heartily at the blank look on my face.

"Look here, that's a logical number for an average man to think of," I protested. "You relied on human nature, not telepathy."

He grinned and tweaked the end of his beard between manicured fingers. "Very good, Wills, try again. A color this time."

I paused a moment before replying, "All right, guess what it is."

He, too, hesitated, staring at me side-

wise. "I think it is blue," he offered at length.

"Go to the head of the class," I grumbled. "I rather expected you to guess red—that's most obvious."

"But I was not guessing," he assured me. "A flash of blue came before my mind's eye. Come, let us try another time."

We continued the experiment for a while. Zoberg was not always correct, but he was surprisingly close in nearly every case. The most interesting results were with the names of persons, and Zoberg achieved some rather mystifying approximations. Thus, when I was thinking of the actor Boris Karloff, he gave me the name of the actor Bela Lugosi. Upon my thinking of Gilbert K. Chesterton, he named Chesterton's close friend Hilaire Belloc, and my concentration on George Bernard Shaw brought forth a shout of "Santa Claus." When I reiterated my charge of psychological trickery and besought him to teach me his method, he grew actually angry and did not speak for more than half an hour. Then he began to discuss our destination.

"A most amazing community," he pronounced. "It is old—one of the oldest inland towns of all America. Wait until you see the houses, my friend. You can almost hear the ghosts within them, in broad daylight. And their Devil's Croft, that is worth seeing, too."

"Their what?"

He shook his head, as though in despair. "And you set yourself up as an authority on occultism!" he sniffed. "Next you will admit that you have never heard of the Druids. A Devil's Croft, my dull young friend, used to be part of every English or Scots village. The good people would set aside a field for Satan, so that he would not take their own lands."

"And this settlement has such a place?"

"*Ja wobl*, a grove of the thickest timber ever seen in this over-civilized country, and hedged in to boot. I do not say that they believe, but it is civic property and protected by special order from trespassers."

"I'd like to visit that grove," I said.

"I pray you!" he cried, waving in protest. "Do not make us unwelcome."

WE ARRIVED shortly before noon. The little town rests in a circular hollow among high wooded hills, and there is not a really good road into it, for two or three miles around. After listening to Zoberg, I had expected something grotesque or forbidding, but I was disappointed. The houses were sturdy and modest, in some cases poor. The greater part of them made a close-huddled mass, like a herd of cattle threatened by wolves, with here and there an isolated dwelling like an adventuresome young fighting-bull. The streets were narrow, crooked and unpaved, and for once in this age I saw buggies and wagons outnumbering automobiles. The central square, with a two-story town hall of red brick and a hideous cast-iron war memorial, still boasted numerous hitching-rails, brown with age and smooth with use. There were few real signs of modern progress. For instance, the drug store was a shabby clapboard affair with "Pharmacy" painted upon its windows, and it sold only drugs, soda and tobacco; while the one hotel was low and rambling and bore the title "Luther Inn." I heard that the population was three hundred and fifty, but I am inclined to think it was closer to three hundred.

We drew up in front of the Luther Inn, and a group of roughly dressed men gazed at us with the somewhat hostile

interrogation that often marks a rural American community at the approach of strangers. These men wore mail-order coats of corduroy or suede—the air was growing nipper by the minute—and plow shoes or high laced boots under dungaree pants. All of them were of Celtic or Anglo-Saxon type.

"Hello!" cried Zoberg jovially. "I see you there, my friend Mr. Gird. How is your charming daughter?"

The man addressed took a step forward from the group on the porch. He was a raw-boned, grizzled native with pale, pouched eyes, and was a trifle better dressed than the others, in a rather ministerial coat of dark cloth and a wide black hat. He cleared his throat before replying.

"Hello, Doctor. Susan's well, thanks. What do you want of us?"

It was a definite challenge, that would repel or anger most men, but Zoberg was not to be denied. He scrambled out of the car and cordially shook the hand of the man he had called Mr. Gird. Meanwhile he spoke in friendly fashion to one or two of the others.

"And here," he wound up, "is a very good friend of mine, Mr. Talbot Wills."

All eyes—and very unfriendly eyes they were, as a whole—turned upon me. I got out slowly, and at Zoberg's insistence shook hands with Gird. Finally the grizzled man came with us to the car.

"I promised you once," he said glumly to Zoberg, "that I would let you and Susan dig as deeply as you wanted to into this matter of spirits. I've often wished since that I hadn't, but my word was never broken yet. Come along with me; Susan is cooking dinner, and there'll be enough for all of us."

He got into the car with us, and as we drove out of the square and toward his house he conversed quietly with Zoberg and me.

"Yes," he answered one of my questions, "the houses are old, as you can see. Some of them have stood since the Revolutionary War with England, and our town's ordinances have stood longer than that. You aren't the first to be impressed, Mr. Wills. Ten years ago a certain millionaire came and said he wanted to endow us, so that we would stay as we are. He had a lot to say about native color and historical value. We told him that we would stay as we are without having to take money from him, or from anybody else for that matter."

GIRD's home was large but low, all one story, and of darkly painted clapboards over heavy timbers. The front door was hung on the most massive hand-wrought hinges. Gird knocked at it, and a slender, smallish girl opened to us.

She wore a woolen dress, as dark as her father's coat, with white at the neck and wrists. Her face, under masses of thunder-black hair, looked Oriental at first glance, what with high cheek-bones and eyes set aslant; then I saw that her eyes were a bright gray like worn silver, and her skin rosy, with a firm chin and a generous mouth. The features were representatively Celtic, after all, and I wondered for perhaps the fiftieth time in my life if there was some sort of blood link between Scot and Mongol. Her hand, on the brass knob of the door, showed as slender and white as some evening flower.

"Susan," said Gird, "here's Doctor Zoberg. And this is his friend, Mr. Wills."

She smiled at Zoberg, then nodded to me, respectfully and rather shyly.

"My daughter," Gird finished the introduction. "Well, dinner must be ready."

She led us inside. The parlor was rather plainer than in most old-fash-

ioned provincial houses, but it was comfortable enough. Much of its furniture would have delighted antique dealers, and one or two pieces would have impressed museum directors. The dining-room beyond had plate-racks on the walls and a long table of dark wood, with high-backed chairs. We had some fried ham, biscuits, coffee and stewed fruit that must have been home-canned. Doctor Zoberg and Gird ate heartily, talking of local trifles, but Susan Gird hardly touched her food. I, watching her with stealthy admiration, forgot to take more than a few mouthfuls.

After the repast she carried out the dishes and we men returned to the parlor. Gird faced us.

"You're here for some more hocus-pocus?" he hazarded gruffly.

"For another séance," amended Zoberg, suave as ever.

"Doctor," said Gird, "I think this had better be the last time."

Zoberg held out a hand in pleading protest, but Gird thrust his own hands behind him and looked sternly stubborn. "It's not good for the girl," he announced definitely.

"But she is a great medium—greater than Eusapia Paladino, or Daniel Home," Zoberg argued earnestly. "She is an important figure in the psychic world, lost and wasted here in this backwater——"

"Please don't miscall our town," interrupted Gird. "Well, Doctor, I agree to a final séance, as you call it. But I'm going to be present."

Zoberg made a gesture as of refusal, but I sided with Gird.

"If this is to be my test, I want another witness," I told Zoberg.

"Ach! If it is a success, you will say that he helped to deceive."

"Not I. I'll arrange things so there will be no deception."

Both Zoberg and Gird stared at me.

I wondered which of them was the more disdainful of my confidence.

Then Susan Gird joined us, and for once I wanted to speak of other subjects than the occult.

3. "*That Thing Isn't My Daughter*——"

IT WAS Zoberg who suggested that I take Susan Gird for a relaxing drive in my car. I acclaimed the idea as a brilliant one, and she, thanking me quietly, put on an archaic-seeming cloak, black and heavy. We left her father and Zoberg talking idly and drove slowly through the town.

She pointed out to me the Devil's Croft of which I had heard from the doctor, and I saw it to be a grove of trees, closely and almost rankly set. It stood apart from the sparser timber on the hills, and around it stretched bare fields. Their emptiness suggested that all the capacity for life had been drained away and poured into that central clump. No road led near to it, and I was obliged to content myself by idling the car at a distance while we gazed and she talked.

"It's evergreen, of course," I said. "Cedar and a little juniper."

"Only in the hedge around it," Susan Gird informed me. "It was planted by the town council about ten years ago."

I stared. "But surely there's greenness in the center, too," I argued.

"Perhaps. They say that the leaves never fall, even in January."

I gazed at what appeared to be a little fluff of white mist above it, the whiter by contrast with the black clouds that lowered around the hill-tops. To my questions about the town council, Susan Gird told me some rather curious things about the government of the community. There were five councilmen, elected every year, and no mayor. Each of the five presided at a meeting in turn. Among

the ordinances enforced by the council was one providing for support of the single church.

"I should think that such an ordinance could be set aside as illegal," I observed.

"I think it could," she agreed, "but nobody has ever wished to try."

The minister of the church, she continued, was invariably a member of the council. No such provision appeared on the town records, nor was it even urged as a "written law," but it had always been deferred to. The single peace officer of the town, she continued, was the duly elected constable. He was always commissioned as deputy sheriff by officials at the county seat, and his duties included census taking, tax collecting and similar matters. The only other officer with a state commission was the justice; and her father, John Gird, had held that post for the last six years.

"He's an attorney, then?" I suggested, but Susan Gird shook her head.

"The only attorney in this place is a retired judge, Keith Pursuivant," she informed me. "He came from some other part of the world, and he appears in town about once a month—lives out yonder past the Croft. As a matter of fact, an ordinary experience of law isn't enough for our peculiar little government."

She spoke of her fellow-townsmen as quiet, simple folk who were content for the most part to keep to themselves, and then, yielding to my earnest pleas, she told me something of herself.

The Gird family counted its descent from an original settler—though she was not exactly sure of when or how the settlement was made—and had borne a leading part in community affairs through more than two centuries. Her mother, who had died when Susan Gird was seven, had been a stranger; an "outlander" was the local term for such, and I think it

is used in Devonshire, which may throw light on the original founders of the community. Apparently this woman had shown some tendencies toward psychic power, for she had several times prophesied coming events or told neighbors where to find lost things. She was well loved for her labors in caring for the sick, and indeed she had died from a fever contracted when tending the victims of an epidemic.

"Doctor Zoberg had known her," Susan Gird related. "He came here several years after her death, and seemed badly shaken when he heard what had happened. He and Father became good friends, and he has been kind to me, too. I remember his saying, the first time we met, that I looked like Mother and that it was apparent that I had inherited her spirit."

She had grown up and spent three years at a teachers' college, but left before graduation, refusing a position at a school so that she could keep house for her lonely father. Still idiotically mannerless, I mentioned the possibility of her marrying some young man of the town. She laughed musically.

"Why, I stopped thinking of marriage when I was fourteen!" she cried. Then, "Look, it's snowing."

So it was, and I thought it time to start for her home. We finished the drive on the best of terms, and when we reached her home in midafternoon, we were using first names.

GIRD, I found, had capitulated to Doctor Zoberg's genial insistence. From disliking the thought of a séance, he had come to savor the prospect of witnessing it—Zoberg had always excluded him before. Gird had even picked up a metaphysical term or two from listening to the doctor, and with these he spiced his normally plain speech.

"This ectoplasm stuff sounds reasonable," he admitted. "If there is any such thing, there could be ghosts, couldn't there?"

Zoberg twinkled, and tilted his beard-spike forward. "You will find that Mr. Wills does not believe in ectoplasm."

"Nor do I believe that the production of ectoplasm would prove existence of a ghost," I added. "What do you say, Miss Susan?"

She smiled and shook her dark head. "To tell you the truth, I'm aware only dimly of what goes on during a séance."

"Most mediums say that," nodded Zoberg sagely.

As the sun set and the darkness came down, we prepared for the experiment.

The dining-room was chosen, as the barest and quietest room in the house. First I made a thorough examination, poking into corners, tapping walls and handling furniture, to the accompaniment of jovial taunts from Zoberg. Then, to his further amusement, I produced from my grip a big lump of sealing-wax, and with this I sealed both the kitchen and parlor doors, stamping the wax with my signet ring. I also closed, latched and sealed the windows, on the sills of which little heaps of snow had begun to collect.

"You're kind of making sure, Mr. Wills," said Gird, lighting a patent carbide lamp.

"That's because I take this business seriously," I replied, and Zoberg clapped his hands in approval.

"Now," I went on, "off with your coats and vests, gentlemen."

Gird and Zoberg complied, and stood up in their shirt-sleeves. I searched and felt them both all over. Gird was a trifle bleak in manner, Zoberg gay and bright-faced. Neither had any concealed apparatus, I made sure. My next move was to set a chair against the parlor door,

seal its legs to the floor, and instruct Gird to sit in it. He did so, and I produced a pair of handcuffs from my bag and shackled his left wrist to the arm of the chair.

"Capital!" cried Zoberg. "Do not be so sour, Mr. Gird. I would not trust handcuffs on Mr. Wills—he was once a magician and knows all the escape tricks."

"Your turn's coming, Doctor," I assured him.

Against the opposite wall and facing Gird's chair I set three more chairs, melting wax around their legs and stamping it. Then I dragged all other furniture far away, arranging it against the kitchen door. Finally I asked Susan to take the central chair of the three, seated Zoberg at her left hand and myself at her right. Beside me, on the floor, I set the carbide lamp.

"With your permission," I said, and produced more manacles. First I fastened Susan's left ankle to Zoberg's right, then her left wrist to his right. Zoberg's left wrist I chained to his chair, leaving him entirely helpless.

"What thick wrists you have!" I commented. "I never knew they were so sinewy."

"You never chained them before," he grinned.

With two more pairs of handcuffs I shackled my own left wrist and ankle to Susan on the right.

"Now we are ready," I pronounced.

"You've treated us like bank robbers," muttered Gird.

"No, no, do not blame Mr. Wills," Zoberg defended me again. He looked anxiously at Susan. "Are you quite prepared, my dear?"

Her eyes met his for a long moment; then she closed them and nodded. I, bound to her, felt a relaxation of her en-

tire body. After a moment she bowed her chin upon her breast.

"Let nobody talk," warned Zoberg softly. "I think that this will be a successful venture. Wills, the light."

With my free hand I turned it out.

All was intensely dark for a moment. Then, as my eyes adjusted themselves, the room seemed to lighten. I could see the deep gray rectangles of the windows, the snow at their bottoms, the blurred outline of the man in his chair across the floor from me, the form of Susan at my left hand. My ears, likewise sharpening, detected the girl's gentle breathing, as if she slept. Once or twice her right hand twitched, shaking my own arm in its manacle. It was as though she sought to attract my attention.

Before and a little beyond her, something pale and cloudy was making itself visible. Even as I fixed my gaze upon it, I heard something that sounded like a gusty panting. It might have been a tired dog or other beast. The pallid mist was changing shape and substance, too, and growing darker. It shifted against the dim light from the windows, and I had a momentary impression of something erect but misshapen—misshapen in an animal way. Was that a head? And were those pointed ears, or part of a head-dress? I told myself determinedly that this was a clever illusion, successful despite my precautions.

It moved, and I heard a rattle upon the planks. Claws, or perhaps hobnails. Did not Gird wear heavy boots? Yet he was surely sitting in his chair; I saw something shift position at that point. The grotesque form had come before me, crouching or creeping.

Despite my self-assurance that this was a trick, I could not govern the chill that swept over me. The thing had come to a halt close to me, was lifting itself as a hound that paws its master's knees. I

was aware of an odor, strange and disagreeable, like the wind from a great beast's cage. Then the paws were upon my lap—indeed, they were not paws. I felt them grip my legs, with fingers and opposable thumbs. A sniffing muzzle thrust almost into my face, and upon its black snout a dim, wet gleam was manifest.

Then Gird, from his seat across the room, screamed hoarsely.

"That thing isn't my daughter——"

In the time it took him to rip out those five words, the huddled monster at my knees whirled back and away from me, reared for a trice like a deformed giant, and leaped across the intervening space upon him. I saw that Gird had tried to rise, his chained wrist hampering him. Then his voice broke in the midst of what he was trying to say; he made a choking sound and the thing emitted a barking growl.

Tearing loose from its wax fastenings, the chair fell upon its side. There was a struggle and a clatter, and Gird squealed like a rabbit in a trap. The attacker fell away from him toward us.

It was all over before one might ask what it was about.

4. *"I Don't Know What Killed Him."*

JUST when I got up I do not remember, but I was on my feet as the grapplers separated. Without thinking of danger—and surely danger was there in the room—I might have rushed forward; but Susan Gird, lying limp in her chair, hampered me in our mutual shackles. Standing where I was, then, I pawed in my pocket for something I had not mentioned to her or to Zoberg; an electric torch.

It fitted itself into my hand, a compact little cylinder, and I whipped it out with my finger on the switch. A cone of white

light spurted across the room, making a pool about and upon the motionless form of Gird. He lay crumpled on one side, his back toward us, and a smudge of black wetness was widening about his slack head and shoulders.

With the beam I swiftly quartered the room, probing it into every corner and shadowed nook. The creature that had attacked Gird had utterly vanished. Susan Gird now gave a soft moan, like a dreamer of dreadful things. I flashed my light her way.

It flooded her face and she quivered under the impact of the glare, but did not open her eyes. Beyond her I saw Zoberg, doubled forward in his bonds. He was staring blackly at the form of Gird, his eyes protruding and his clenched teeth showing through his beard.

"Doctor Zoberg!" I shouted at him, and his face jerked nervously toward me. It was fairly cross-hatched with tense lines, and as white as fresh pipe-clay. He tried to say something, but his voice would not command itself.

Dropping the torch upon the floor, I next dug keys from my pocket and with trembling haste unlocked the irons from Susan Gird's wrist and ankle on my side. Then, stepping hurriedly to Zoberg, I made him sit up and freed him as speedily as possible. Finally I returned, found my torch again and stepped across to Gird.

My first glance at close quarters was enough; he was stone-dead, with his throat torn brutally out. His cheeks, too, were ripped in parallel gashes, as though by the grasp of claws or nails. Radiance suddenly glowed behind me, and Zoberg moved forward, holding up the carbide lamp.

"I found this beside your chair," he told me unsteadily. "I found a match and lighted it." He looked down at

Gird, and his lips twitched, as though he would be hysterical.

"Steady, Doctor," I cautioned him sharply, and took the lamp from him. "See what you can do for Gird."

He stooped slowly, as though he had grown old. I stepped to one side, putting the lamp on the table. Zoberg spoke again:

"It is absolutely no use, Wills. We can do nothing. Gird has been killed."

I had turned my attention to the girl. She still sagged in her chair, breathing deeply and rhythmically as if in untroubled slumber.

"Susan," I called her. "Susan!"

She did not stir, and Doctor Zoberg came back to where I bent above her. "Susan," he whispered penetratingly, "wake up, child."

Her eyes unveiled themselves slowly, and looked up at us. "What——" she began drowsily.

"Prepare yourself," I cautioned her quickly. "Something has happened to your father."

She stared across at Gird's body, and then she screamed, tremulously and long. Zoberg caught her in his arms, and she swayed and shuddered against their supporting circle. From her own wrists my irons still dangled, and they clanked as she wrung her hands in aimless distraction.

Going to the dead man once more, I unchained him from the chair and turned him upon his back. Susan's black cloak lay upon one of the other chairs, and I picked it up and spread it above him. Then I went to each door in turn, and to the windows.

"The seals are unbroken," I reported. "There isn't a space through which even a mouse could slip in or out. Yet——"

"I did it!" wailed Susan suddenly. "Oh, my God, what dreadful thing came out of me to murder my father!"

I UNFASTENED the parlor door and opened it. Almost at the same time a loud knock sounded from the front of the house.

Zoberg lifted his head, nodding to me across Susan's trembling shoulder. His arms were still clasped around her, and I could not help but notice that they seemed thin and ineffectual now. When I had chained them, I had wondered at their steely cording. Had this awful calamity drained him of strength?

"Go," he said hoarsely. "See who it is."

I went. Opening the front door, I came face to face with a tall, angular silhouette in a slouch hat with snow on the brim.

"Who are you?" I jerked out, startled.

"O'Bryant," boomed back an organ-deep bass. "What's the fuss here?"

"Well——" I began, then hesitated.

"Stranger in town, ain't you?" was the next question. "I saw you when you stopped at the Luther Inn. I'm O'Bryant—the constable."

He strode across the door-sill, peered about him in the dark, and then slouched into the lighted dining-room. Following, I made him out as a stern, roughly dressed man of forty or so, with a lean face made strong by a salient chin and a simitar nose. His light blue eyes studied the still form of John Gird, and he stooped to draw away the cloak. Susan gave another agonized cry, and I heard Zoberg gasp as if deeply shocked. The constable, too, flinched and replaced the cloak more quickly than he had taken it up.

"Who done that?" he barked at me.

Again I found it hard to answer. Constable O'Bryant sniffed suspiciously at each of us in turn, took up the lamp and herded us into the parlor. There he made us take seats.

"I want to know everything about this

business," he said harshly. "You," he flung at me, "you seem to be the closest to sensible. Give me the story, and don't leave out a single bit of it."

Thus commanded, I made shift to describe the séance and what had led up to it. I was as uneasy as most innocent people are when unexpectedly questioned by peace officers. O'Bryant interrupted twice with a guttural "Huh!" and once with a credulous whistle.

"And this killing happened in the dark?" he asked when I had finished. "Well, which of you dressed up like a devil and done it?"

Susan whimpered and bowed her head. Zoberg, outraged, sprang to his feet.

"It was a creature from another world," he protested angrily. "None of us had a reason to kill Mr. Gird."

O'Bryant emitted a sharp, equine laugh. "Don't go to tell me any ghost stories, Doctor Zoberg. We folks have heard a lot about the hocus-pocus you've pulled off here from time to time. Looks like it might have been to cover up some kind of rough stuff."

"How could it be?" demanded Zoberg. "Look here, Constable, these handcuffs." He held out one pair of them. "We were all confined with them, fastened to chairs that were sealed to the floor. Mr. Gird was also chained, and his chair made fast out of our reach. Go into the next room and look for yourself."

"Let me see them irons," grunted O'Bryant, snatching them.

He turned them over and over in his hands, snapped them shut, tugged and pressed, then held out a hand for my keys. Unlocking the cuffs, he peered into the clamping mechanism.

"These are regulation bracelets," he pronounced. "You were all chained up, then?"

"We were," replied Zoberg, and both Susan and I nodded.

Into the constable's blue eyes came a sudden shrewd light. "I guess you must have been, at that. But did you stay that way?" He whipped suddenly around, bending above my chair to fix his gaze upon me. "How about you, Mr. Wills?"

"Of course we stayed that way," I replied.

"Yeh? Look here, ain't you a professional magician?"

"How did you know that?" I asked.

He grinned widely and without warmth. "The whole town's been talking about you, Mr. Wills. A stranger can't be here all day without his whole record coming out." The grin vanished. "You're a magician, all right, and you can get out of handcuffs. Ain't that so?"

"Of course it's so," Zoberg answered for me. "But why should that mean that my friend has killed Mr. Gird?"

O'Bryant wagged his head in triumph. "That's what we'll find out later. Right now it adds up very simple. Gird was killed, in a room that was all sealed up. Three other folks was in with him, all handcuffed to their chairs. Which of them got loose without the others catching on?" He nodded brightly at me, as if in answer to his own question.

Zoberg gave me a brief, penetrating glance, then seemed to shrivel up in his own chair. He looked almost as exhausted as Susan. I, too, was feeling near to collapse.

"You want to own up, Mr. Wills?" invited O'Bryant.

"I certainly do not," I snapped at him. "You've got the wrong man."

"I thought," he made answer, as though catching me in a damaging admission, "that it was a devil, not a man, who killed Gird."

I shook my head. "I don't know what killed him."

"Maybe you'll remember after a while." He turned toward the door,

W. T.—5

"You come along with me. I'm going to lock you up."

I rose with a sigh of resignation, but paused for a moment to address Zoberg. "Get hold of yourself," I urged him. "Get somebody in here to look after Miss Susan, and then clarify in your mind what happened. You can help me prove that it wasn't I."

Zoberg nodded very wearily, but did not look up.

"Don't neither of you go into that room where the body is," O'Bryant warned them. "Mr. Wills, get your coat and hat."

I did so, and we left the house. The snow was inches deep and still falling. O'Bryant led me across the street and knocked on the door of a peak-roofed house. A swarthy little man opened to us.

"There's been a murder, Jim," said O'Bryant importantly. "Over at Gird's. You're deputized—go and keep watch. Better take the missus along, to look after Susan. She's bad cut up about it."

We left the new deputy in charge and walked down the street, then turned into the square. Two or three men standing in front of the "Pharmacy" stared curiously, then whispered as we passed. Another figure paused to give me a searching glance. I was not too stunned to be irritated.

"Who are those?" I asked the constable.

"Town fellows," he informed me. "They're mighty interested to see what a killer looks like."

"How do they know about the case?" I almost groaned.

He achieved his short, hard laugh.

"Didn't I say that news travels fast in a town like this? Half the folks are talking about the killing this minute."

"You'll find you made a mistake," I assured him.

"If I have, I'll beg your pardon handsome. Meanwhile, I'll do my duty."

We were at the red brick town hall by now. At O'Bryant's side I mounted the granite steps and waited while he unlocked the big double door with a key the size of a can-opener.

"We're a kind of small town," he observed, half apologetically, "but there's a cell upstairs for you. Take off your hat and overcoat—you're staying inside till further notice."

5. *"They Want to Take the Law into Their Own Hands"*

THE cell was an upper room of the town hall, with a heavy wooden door and a single tiny window. The walls were of bare, unplastered brick, the floor of concrete and the ceiling of white-washed planks. An oil lamp burned in a bracket. The only furniture was an iron bunk hinged to the wall just below the window, a wire-bound straight chair and an unpainted table. On top of this last stood a bowl and pitcher, with playing-cards scattered around them.

Constable O'Bryant locked me in and peered through a small grating in the door. He was all nose and eyes and wide lips, like a sardonic Punchinello.

"Look here," I addressed him suddenly, for the first time controlling my frayed nerves; "I want a lawyer."

"There ain't no lawyer in town," he boomed sourly.

"Isn't there a Judge Pursuivant in the neighborhood?" I asked, remembering something that Susan had told me.

"He don't practise law," O'Bryant grumbled, and his beaked face slid out of sight.

I turned to the table, idly gathered up the cards into a pack and shuffled them. To steady my still shaky fingers, I produced a few simple sleight-of-hand ef-

fects, palming of aces, making a king rise to the top, and springing the pack accordion-wise from one hand to the other.

"I'd sure hate to play poker with you," volunteered O'Bryant, who had come again to gaze at me.

I crossed to the grating and looked through at him. "You've got the wrong man," I said once more. "Even if I were guilty, you couldn't keep me from talking to a lawyer."

"Well, I'm doing it, ain't I?" he taunted me. "You wait until tomorrow and we'll go to the county seat. The sheriff can do whatever he wants to about a lawyer for you."

He ceased talking and listened. I heard the sound, too—a hoarse, dull murmur as of coal in a chute, or a distant, lowing herd of troubled cattle.

"What's that?" I asked him.

O'Bryant, better able to hear in the corridor, cocked his lean head for a moment. Then he cleared his throat. "Sounds like a lot of people talking, out in the square," he replied. "I wonder——"

He broke off quickly and walked away. The murmur was growing. I, pressing close to the grating to follow the constable with my eyes, saw that his shoulders were squared and his hanging fists doubled, as though he were suddenly aware of a lurking danger.

He reached the head of the stairs and clumped down, out of my sight. I turned back to the cell, walked to the bunk and, stepping upon it, raised the window. To the outside of the wooden frame two flat straps of iron had been securely bolted to act as bars. To these I clung as I peered out.

I was looking from the rear of the hall toward the center of the square, with the war memorial and the far line of shops and houses seen dimly through a thick curtain of falling snow. Something

dark moved closer to the wall beneath, and I heard a cry, as if of menace.

"I see his head in the window!" bawled a voice, and more cries greeted this statement. A moment later a heavy missile hit the wall close to the frame.

I dropped back from the window and went once more to the grating of the door. Through it I saw O'Bryant coming back, accompanied by several men. They came close and peered through at me.

"Let me out," I urged. "That's a mob out there."

O'Bryant nodded dolefully. "Nothing like this ever happened here before," he said, as if he were responsible for the town's whole history of violence. "They act like they want to take the law into their own hands."

A short, fat man spoke at his elbow. "We're members of the town council, Mr. Wills. We heard that some of the citizens were getting ugly. We came here to look after you. We promise full protection."

"Amen," intoned a thinner specimen, whom I guessed to be the preacher.

"There are only half a dozen of you," I pointed out. "Is that enough to guard me from a violent mob?"

As if to lend significance to my question, from below and in front of the building came a great shout, compounded of many voices. Then a loud pounding echoed through the corridor, like a bludgeon on stout panels.

"You locked the door, Constable?" asked the short man.

"Sure I did," nodded O'Bryant.

A perfect rain of buffets sounded from below, then a heavy impact upon the front door of the hall. I could hear the hinges creak.

"They're trying to break the door down," whispered one of the council.

The short man turned resolutely on his heel. "There's a window at the landing

of the stairs," he said. "Let's go and try to talk to them from that."

The whole party followed him away, and I could hear their feet on the stairs, then the lifting of a heavy window-sash. A loud and prolonged yelling came to my ears, as if the gathering outside had sighted and recognized a line of heads on the sill above them.

"Fellow citizens!" called the stout man's voice, but before he could go on a chorus of cries and hoots drowned him out. I could hear more thumps and surging shoves at the creaking door.

Escape I must. I whipped around and fairly ran to the bunk, mounting it a second time for a peep from my window. Nobody was visible below; apparently those I had seen previously had run to the front of the hall, there to hear the bellowings of the officials and take a hand in forcing the door.

Once again I dropped to the floor and began to tug at the fastenings of the bunk. It was an open oblong of metal, a stout frame of rods strung with springy wire netting. It could be folded upward against the wall and held with a catch, or dropped down with two lengths of chain to keep it horizontal. I dragged the mattress and blankets from it, then began a close examination of the chains. They were stoutly made, but the screw-plates that held them to the brick wall might be loosened. Clutching one chain with both my hands, I tugged with all my might, a foot braced against the wall. A straining heave, and it came loose.

At the same moment an explosion echoed through the corridor at my back, and more shouts rang through the air. Either O'Bryant or the mob had begun to shoot. Then a rending crash shook the building, and I heard one of the councilmen shouting: "Another like that and the door will be down!"

His words inspired additional speed

within me. I took the loose end of the chain in my hand. Its links were of twisted iron, and the final one had been sawed through to admit the loop of the screw-plate, then clamped tight again. But my frantic tugging had widened this narrow cut once more, and quickly I freed it from the dangling plate. Then, folding the bunk against the wall, I drew the chain upward. It would just reach to the window—that open link would hook around one of the flat bars.

THE noise of breakage rang louder in the front of the building. Once more I heard the voice of the short councilman: "I command you all to go home, before Constable O'Bryant fires on you again!"

"We got guns, too!" came back a defiant shriek, and in proof of this statement came a rattle of shots. I heard an agonized moan, and the voice of the minister: "Are you hit?"

"In the shoulder," was O'Bryant's deep, savage reply.

My chain fast to the bar, I pulled back and down on the edge of the bunk. It gave some leverage, but not enough—the bar was fastened too solidly. Desperate, I clambered upon the iron framework. Gaining the sill, I moved sidewise, then turned and braced my back against the wall. With my feet against the edge of the bunk, I thrust it away with all the strength in both my legs. A creak and a ripping sound, and the bar pulled slowly out from its bolts.

But a roar and thunder of feet told me that the throng outside had gained entrance to the hall at last.

I heard a last futile flurry of protesting cries from the councilmen as the steps echoed with the charge of many heavy boots. I waited no longer, but swung myself to the sill and wriggled through the narrow space where the bar had come

out. A lapel of my jacket tore against the frame, but I made it. Clinging by the other bar, I made out at my side a narrow band of perpendicular darkness against the wall, and clutched at it. It was a tin drainpipe, by the feel of it.

An attack was being made upon the door of the cell. The wood splintered before a torrent of blows, and I heard people pushing in.

"He's gone!" yelled a rough voice, and, a moment later: "Hey, look at the window!"

I had hold of the drainpipe, and gave it my entire weight. Next instant it had torn loose from its flimsy supports and bent sickeningly outward. Yet it did not let me down at once, acting rather as a slender sapling to the top of which an adventuresome boy has sprung. Still holding to it, I fell sprawling in the snow twenty feet beneath the window I had quitted. Somebody shouted from above and a gun spoke.

"Get him!" screamed many voices. "Get him, you down below!"

But I was up and running for my life. The snow-filled square seemed to whip away beneath my feet. Dodging around the war memorial, I came face to face with somebody in a bearskin coat. He shouted for me to halt, in the reedy voice of an ungrown lad, and the fierce-set face that shoved at me had surely never felt a razor. But I, who dared not be merciful even to so untried an enemy, struck with both fists even as I hurtled against him. He whimpered and dropped, and I, springing over his falling body, dashed on.

A wind was rising, and it bore to me the howls of my pursuers from the direction of the hall. Two or three more guns went off, and one bullet whickered over my head. By then I had reached the far side of the square, hurried across the

street and up an alley. The snow, still falling densely, served to baffle the men who ran shouting in my wake. Too, nearly everyone who had been on the streets had gone to the front of the hall, and except for the boy at the memorial none offered to turn me back.

I came out upon a street beyond the square, quiet and ill-lit. Along this way, I remembered, I could approach the Gird home, where my automobile was parked. Once at the wheel, I could drive to the county seat and demand protection from the sheriff. But, as I came cautiously near the place and could see through the blizzard the outline of the car, I heard loud voices. A part of the mob had divined my intent and had branched off to meet me.

I ran down a side street, but they had seen me. "There he is!" they shrieked at one another. "Plug him!" Bullets struck the wall of a house as I fled past it, and the owner, springing to the door with an angry protest, joined the chase a moment later.

I WAS panting and staggering by now, and so were most of my pursuers. Only three or four, lean young athletes, were gaining and coming even close to my heels. With wretched determination I maintained my pace, winning free of the close-set houses of the town, wriggling between the rails of a fence and striking off through the drifting snow of a field.

"Hey, he's heading for the Croft!" someone was wheezing, not far behind.

"Let him go in," growled another runner. "He'll wish he hadn't."

Yet again someone fired, and yet again the bullet went wide of me; moving swiftly, and half veiled by the dark and the wind-tossed snowfall, I was a bad target that night. And, lifting my head, I saw indeed the dense timber of the

Devil's Croft, its tops seeming to toss and fall like the black waves of a high-pent sea.

It was an inspiration, helped by the shouts of the mob. Nobody went into that grove—avoidance of it had become a community habit, almost a community instinct. Even if my enemies paused only temporarily I could shelter well among the trunks, catch my breath, perhaps hide indefinitely. And surely Zoberg would be recovered, would back up my protest of innocence. With two words for it, the fantasy would not seem so ridiculous. All this I sorted over in my mind as I ran toward the Devil's Croft.

Another rail fence rose in my way. I feared for a moment that it would baffle me, so fast and far had I run and so greatly drained away was my strength. Yet I scrambled over somehow, slipped and fell beyond, got up and ran crookedly on. The trees were close now. Closer. Within a dozen yards. Behind me I heard oaths and warning exclamations. The pursuit was ceasing at last.

I found myself against close-set evergreens; that would be the hedge of which Susan Gird had told me. Pushing between and through the interlaced branches, I hurried on for five or six steps, cannoned from a big tree-trunk, went sprawling, lifted myself for another brief run and then, with my legs like strips of paper, dropped once more. I crept forward on hands and knees. Finally I collapsed upon my face. The weight of all I had endured—the séance, the horrible death of John Gird, my arrest, my breaking from the cell and my wild run for life—overwhelmed me as I lay.

Thus I must lie, I told myself hazily, until they came and caught me. I heard, or fancied I heard, movement near by, then a trilling whistle. A signal? It sounded like the song of a little frog.

Odd thought in this blizzard. I was thinking foolishly of frogs, while I sprawled face down in the snow. . . .

But where was the snow?

There was damp underneath, but it was warm damp, like that of a riverside in July. In my nostrils was a smell of green life, the smell of parks and hot-houses. My fists closed upon something.

Two handfuls of soft, crisp moss!

I rose to my elbows. A white flower bobbed and swayed before my nose, shedding perfume upon me.

Far away, as though in another world, I heard the rising of the wind that was beating the snow into great drifts—but that was outside the Devil's Croft.

In the fascinating next installment of this story, Talbot Wills comes face to face in mortal combat with the frightful terror of the Devil's Croft. Reserve your copy at your magazine dealer's now.



FEBRUARY

Weird Tales

25c

FROZEN BEAUTY

an arresting story
of a great surgeon's
weird experiment

By
SEABURY QUINN

Clifford Ball
M. G. Moretti
Henry Kuttner



The Hairy Ones Shall Dance

By GANS T. FIELD

*A novel of a hideous, stark horror that struck during a spirit séance—
a tale of terror and sudden death, and the frightful thing
that laired in the Devil's Croft*

The Story Thus Far

6. "Eyes of Fire!"

TALBOT WILLS, the narrator, has given up a career as a stage magician to study psychic phenomena. Though a skeptic, he is on good terms with Doctor Otto Zoberg, a lecturing expert on spiritism and other occult subjects. Zoberg, seeking to convert him, takes him to an isolated hamlet where a spirit medium of unusual powers is located.

Wills finds the medium an attractive young woman, Susan Gird. A séance is held in the Gird home, where, though all are handcuffed, a strange wolf-like shape moves in the dark. When Susan Gird's father cries out some sort of accusation, the shape springs upon him and rends him to death. The town constable comes to investigate and, inasmuch as Wills is a magician and escape artist, accuses him of the murder.

Wills is confined in a cell. When an angry mob gathers to lynch him, he breaks out, flees through the town and across a snow-covered field toward the Devil's Croft, a mysterious grove which by custom is never entered by the townspeople. As he enters it, he falls, exhausted. Lying thus, he realizes that, though a blizzard is raging outside the grove, inside are leaves, moss, flowers and grass, and that the air is as warm as though it were midsummer.

The story continues:

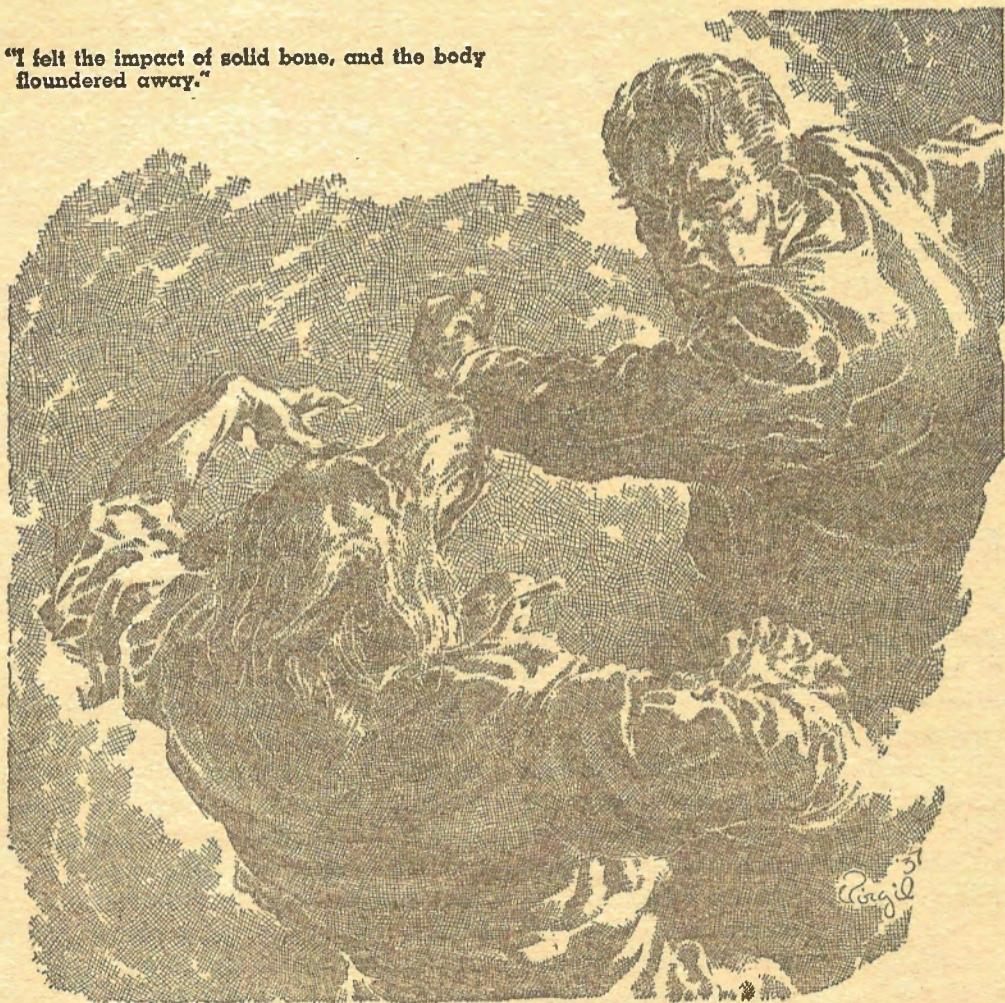
IT PROVES something for human habit and narcotic-dependence that my first action upon rising was to pull out a cigarette and light it.

The match flared briefly upon rich greenness. I might have been in a subtropical swamp. Then the little flame winked out and the only glow was the tip of my cigarette. I gazed upward for a glimpse of the sky, but found only darkness. Leafy branches made a roof over me. My brow felt damp. It was sweat—warm sweat.

I held the coal of the cigarette to my wrist-watch. It seemed to have stopped, and I lifted it to my ear. No ticking—undoubtedly I had jammed it into silence, perhaps at the séance, perhaps during my escape from prison and the mob. The hands pointed to eighteen minutes past eight, and it was certainly much later than that. I wished for the electric torch that I had dropped in the dining-room at Gird's, then was glad I had not brought it to flash my position to possible watchers outside the grove.

Yet the tight cedar hedge and the inner belts of trees and bushes, richly foliaged as they must be, would certainly hide me and any light I might make. I felt considerably stronger in body and will by now, and made shift to walk gropingly toward the center of the timber-clump. Once, stooping to finger the ground on which I walked, I felt not only

"I felt the impact of solid bone, and the body floundered away."



moss but soft grass. Again, a hanging vine dragged across my face. It was wet, as if from condensed mist, and it bore sweet flowers that showed dimly like little pallid trumpets in the dark.

The frog-like chirping that I had heard when first I fell had been going on without cessation. It was much nearer now, and when I turned in its direction, I saw a little glimmer of water. Two more careful steps, and my foot sank into wet, warm mud. I stooped and put a hand into a tiny stream, almost as warm as the air. The frog, whose home I was disturbing, fell silent once more.

I struck a match, hoping to see a way across. The stream was not more than three feet in width, and it flowed slowly from the interior of the grove. In that direction hung low mists, through which broad leaves gleamed wetly. On my side its brink was fairly clear, but on the other grew lush, dripping bushes. I felt in the stream once more, and found it was little more than a finger deep. Then, holding the end of the match in my fingers, I stooped as low as possible, to see what I could of the nature of the ground beneath the bushes.

The small beam carried far, and I let

myself think of Shakespeare's philosophy anent the candle and the good deed in a naughty world. Then philosophy and Shakespeare flew from my mind, for I saw beneath the bushes the feet of—of what stood behind them.

They were two in number, those feet; but not even at first glimpse did I think they were human. I had an impression of round pedestals and calfless shanks, dark and hairy. They moved as I looked, moved cautiously closer, as if their owner was equally anxious to see me. I dropped the match into the stream and sprang up and back.

No pursuer from the town would have felt like that.

My heart began to pound as it had never pounded during my race for life. I clutched at the low limb of a tree, hoping to tear it loose for a possible weapon of defense; the wood was rotten, and almost crumpled in my grasp.

"Who's there?" I challenged, but most unsteadily and without much menace in my voice. For answer the bushes rustled yet again, and something blacker than they showed itself among them.

I cannot be ashamed to say that I retreated again, farther this time; let him who has had a like experience decide whether to blame me. Feeling my way among the trees, I put several stout stems between me and that lurker by the water-side. They would not fence it off, but might baffle it for a moment. Meanwhile, I heard the water splash. It was wading cautiously through—it was going to follow me.

I found myself standing in a sort of lane, and did not bother until later to wonder how a lane could exist in that grove where no man ever walked. It was a welcome avenue of flight to me, and I went along it at a swift, crouching run. The footing, as everywhere, was damp and mossy, and I made very little noise.

Not so my unchancy companion of the brook, for I heard a heavy body crashing among twigs and branches to one side. I began to ask myself, as I hurried, what the beast could be—for I was sure that it was a beast. A dog from some farmhouse, that did not know or understand the law against entering the Devil's Croft? That I had seen only two feet did not preclude two more, I now assured myself, and I would have welcomed a big, friendly dog. Yet I did not know that this one was friendly, and could not bid myself to stop and see.

The lane wound suddenly to the right, and then into a clearing.

Here, too, the branches overhead kept out the snow and the light, but things were visible ever so slightly. I stood as if in a room, earth-floored, trunk-walled, leaf-thatched. And I paused for a breath—it was more damply warm than ever. With that breath came some strange new serenity of spirit, even an amused self-mockery. What had I seen and heard, indeed? I had come into the grove after a terrific hour or so of danger and exertion, and my mind had at once busied itself in building grotesque dangers where no dangers could be. Have another smoke, I said to myself, and get hold of your imagination; already that pursuit-noise you fancied has gone. Alone in the clearing and the dark, I smiled as though to mock myself back into self-confidence. Even this little patch of summer night into which I had blundered from the heart of the blizzard—even it had some good and probably simple explanation. I fished out a cigarette and struck a light.

At that moment I was facing the bosky tunnel from which I had emerged into the open space. My matchlight struck two sparks in that tunnel, two sparks that were pushing stealthily toward me. Eyes of fire!

Cigarette and match fell from my

hands. For one wild half-instant I thought of flight, then knew with a throat-stopping certainty that I must not turn my back on this thing. I planted my feet and clenched by fists.

"Who's there?" I cried, as once before at the side of the brook.

This time I had an answer. It was a hoarse, deep-chested rumble, it might have been a growl or an oath. And a shadow stole out from the lane, straightening up almost within reach of me.

I had seen that silhouette before, misshapen and point-eared, in the dining-room of John Gird.

7. *"Had the Thing Been So Hairy?"*

IT DID not charge at once, or I might have been killed then, like John Gird, and the writing of this account left to another hand. While it closed cautiously in, I was able to set myself for defense. I also made out some of its details, and hysterically imagined more.

Its hunched back and narrow shoulders gave nothing of weakness to its appearance, suggesting rather an inhuman plentitude of bone and muscle behind. At first it was crouched, as if on all-fours, but then it reared. For all its legs were bent, its great length of body made it considerably taller than I. Upper limbs—I hesitate at calling them arms—sparred questioningly at me.

I moved a stride backward, but kept my face to the enemy.

"You killed Gird!" I accused it, in a voice steady enough but rather strained and shrill. "Come on and kill me! I promise you a damned hard bargain of it."

The creature shrank away in turn, as though it understood the words and was momentarily daunted by them. Its head, which I could not make out, sank low before those crooked shoulders and

swayed rhythmically like the head of a snake before striking. The rush was coming, and I knew it.

"Come on!" I dared it again. "What are you waiting for? I'm not chained down, like Gird. I'll give you a devil of a fight."

I had my fists up and I feinted, boxer-wise, with a little weaving jerk of the knees. The blot of blackness started violently, ripped out a snarl from somewhere inside it, and sprang at me.

I had an impression of paws flung out and a head twisted sidewise, with long teeth bared to snap at my throat. Probably it meant to clutch my shoulders with its fingers—it had them, I had felt them on my knee at the séance. But I had planned my own campaign in those tense seconds. I slid my left foot forward as the enemy lunged, and my left fist drove for the muzzle. My knuckles barked against the huge, inhuman teeth, and I brought over a roundabout right, with shoulder and hip driving in back of it. The head, slanted as it was, received this right fist high on the brow. I felt the impact of solid bone, and the body floundered away to my left. I broke ground right, turned and raised my hands as before.

"Want any more of the same?" I taunted it, as I would a human antagonist after scoring.

The failure of its attack had been only temporary. My blows had set it off balance, but could hardly have been decisive. I heard a coughing snort, as though the thing's muzzle was bruised, and it quartered around toward me once more. Without warning and with amazing speed it rushed.

I had no time to set myself now. I did try to leap backward, but I was not quick enough. It had me, gripping the lapels of my coat and driving me down and over with its flying weight. I felt the wet

ground spin under my heels, and then it came flying up against my shoulders. Instinctively I had clutched upward at a throat with my right hand, clutched a handful of skin, loose and rankly shaggy. My left, also by instinct, flew backward to break my fall. It closed on something hard, round and smooth.

The rank odor that I had known at the séance was falling around me like a blanket, and the clashing white teeth shoved nearer, nearer. But the rock in my left hand spelled sudden hope. Without trying to roll out from under, I smote with that rock. My clutch on the hairy throat helped me to judge accurately where the head would be. A moment later, and the struggling bulk above me went limp under the impact. Shoving it aside, I scrambled free and gained my feet once more.

The monster lay motionless where I had thrust it from me. Every nerve a-tingle, I stooped. My hand poised the rock for another smashing blow, but there was no sign of fight from the fallen shape. I could hear only a gusty breathing, as of something in stunned pain.

"Lie right where you are, you murdering brute," I cautioned it, my voice ringing exultant as I realized I had won. "If you move, I'll smash your skull in."

My right hand groped in my pocket for a match, struck it on the back of my leg. I bent still closer for a clear look at my enemy.

Had the thing been so hairy? Now, as I gazed, it seemed only sparsely furred. The ears, too, were blunter than I thought, and the muzzle not so—

Why, it was half human! Even as I watched, it was becoming more human still, a sprawled human figure! And, as the fur seemed to vanish in patches, was it clothing I saw, as though through the rents in a bearskin overcoat?

My senses churned in my own head. The fear that had ridden me all night be-

came suddenly unreasoning. I fled as before, this time without a thought of where I was going or what I would do. The forbidden grove, lately so welcome as a refuge, swarmed with evil. I reached the edge of the clearing, glanced back once. The thing I had stricken down was beginning to stir, to get up. I ran from it as from a devil.

Somehow I had come to the stream again, or to another like it. The current moved more swiftly at this point, with a noticeable murmur. As I tried to spring across I landed short, and gasped in sudden pain, for the water was scalding hot. Of such are the waters of hell. . . .

I CANNOT remember my flight through that steaming swamp that might have been a corner of Satan's own park. Somewhere along the way I found a tough, fleshy stem, small enough to rend from its rooting and wield as a club. With it in my hand I paused, with a rather foolish desire to return along my line of retreat for another and decisive encounter with the shaggy being. But what if it would foresee my coming and lie in wait? I knew how swiftly it could spring, how strong was its grasp. Once at close quarters, my club would be useless, and those teeth might find their objective. I cast aside the impulse, that had welled from I know not what primitive core of me, and hurried on.

Evergreens were before me on a sudden, and through them filtered a blast of cold air. The edge of the grove, and beyond it the snow and the open sky, perhaps a resumption of the hunt by the mob; but capture and death at their hands would be clean and welcome compared to—

Feet squelched in the dampness behind me.

I pivoted with a hysterical oath, and swung up my club in readiness to strike.

The great dark outline that had come upon me took one step closer, then paused. I sprang at it, struck and missed as it dodged to one side.

"All right then, let's have it out," I managed to blurt, though my voice was drying up in my throat. "Come on, show your face."

"I'm not here to fight you," a good-natured voice assured me. "Why, I seldom even argue, except with proven friends."

I relaxed a trifle, but did not lower my club. "Who are you?"

"Judge Keith Pursuivant," was the level response, as though I had not just finished trying to kill him. "You must be the young man they're so anxious to hang, back in town. Is that right?"

I made no answer.

"Silence makes admission," the stranger said. "Well, come along to my house. This grove is between it and town, and nobody will bother us for the night, at least."

8. "A Trick that Almost Killed You."

WHEN I stepped into the open with Judge Keith Pursuivant, the snow had ceased and a full moon glared through a rip in the clouds, making diamond dust of the sugary drifts. By its light I saw my companion with some degree of plainness—a man of great height and girth, with a wide black hat and a voluminous gray ulster. His face was as round as the moon itself, at least as shiny, and much warmer to look at. A broad bulbous nose and broad bulbous eyes beamed at me, while under a drooping blond mustache a smile seemed to be lurking. Apparently he considered the situation a pleasant one.

"I'm not one of the mob," he informed me reassuringly. "These pastimes of the town do not attract me. I left such things

behind when I dropped out of politics and practise—oh, I was active in such things, ten years ago up North—and took up meditation."

"I've heard that you keep to yourself," I told him.

"You heard correctly. My black servant does the shopping and brings me the gossip. Most of the time it bores me, but not today, when I learned about you and the killing of John Gird——"

"And you came looking for me?"

"Of course. By the way, that was a wise impulse, ducking into the Devil's Croft."

But I shuddered, and not with the chill of the outer night. He made a motion for me to come along, and we began tramping through the soft snow toward a distant light under the shadow of a hill. Meanwhile I told him something of my recent adventures, saving for the last my struggle with the monster in the grove.

He heard me through, whistling through his teeth at various points. At the end of my narrative he muttered to himself:

"The hairy ones shall dance——"

"What was that, sir?" I broke in, without much courtesy.

"I was quoting from the prophet Isaiah. He was speaking of ruined Babylon, not a strange transplanted bit of the tropics, but otherwise it falls pat. Suggestive of a demon-festival. 'The hairy ones shall dance there.'"

"Isaiah, you say? I used to be something of a Bible reader, but I'm afraid I don't remember the passage."

He smiled sideways at me. "But I'm translating direct from the original, Mr. —Wills is the name, eh? The original Hebrew of the prophet Isaiah, whoever he was. The classic-ridden compilers of the King James Version have satyrs dancing, and the prosaic Revised Version offers nothing more startling than goats.

But Isaiah and the rest of the ancient peoples knew that there were 'hairy ones.' Perhaps you encountered one of that interesting breed tonight."

"I don't want to encounter it a second time," I confessed, and again I shuddered.

"That is something we will talk over more fully. What do you think of the Turkish bath accommodations you have just left behind?"

"To tell you the truth, I don't know what to think. Growing green stuff and a tropical temperature, with snow outside——"

He waved the riddle away. "Easily and disappointingly explained, Mr. Wills. Hot springs."

I stopped still, shin-deep in wet snow. "What!" I ejaculated.

"Oh, I've been there many times, in defiance of local custom and law—I'm not a native, you see." Once more his warming smile. "There are at least three springs, and the thick growth of trees makes a natural enclosure, roof and walls, to hold in the damp heat. It's not the only place of its kind in the world, Mr. Wills. But the thing you met there is a trifle more difficult of explanation. Come on home—we'll both feel better when we sit down."

WE FINISHED the journey in half an hour. Judge Pursuivant's house was stoutly made of heavy hewn timbers, somewhat resembling certain lodges I had seen in England. Inside was a large, low-ceilinged room with a hanging oil lamp and a welcome open fire. A fat blond cat came leisurely forward to greet us. Its broad, good-humored face, large eyes and drooping whiskers gave it somewhat of a resemblance to its master.

"Better get your things off," advised the judge. He raised his voice. "William!"

A squat negro with a sensitive brown face appeared from a door at the back of the house.

"Bring in a bathrobe and slippers for this gentleman," ordered Judge Pursuivant, and himself assisted me to take off my muddy jacket. Thankfully I peeled off my other garments, and when the servant appeared with the robe I slid into it with a sigh.

"I'm in your hands, Judge Pursuivant," I said. "If you want to turn me over——"

"I might surrender you to an officer," he interrupted, "but never to a lawless mob. You'd better sit here for a time—and talk to me."

Near the fire was a desk, with an arm-chair at either side of it. We took seats, and when William returned from disposing of my wet clothes, he brought along a tray with a bottle of whisky, a siphon and some glasses. The judge prepared two drinks and handed one to me. At his insistence, I talked for some time about the séance and the events leading up to it.

"Remarkable," mused Judge Pursuivant. Then his great shrewd eyes studied me. "Don't go to sleep there, Mr. Wills. I know you're tired, but I want to talk lycanthropy."

"Lycanthropy?" I repeated. "You mean the science of the werewolf?" I smiled and shook my head. "I'm afraid I'm no authority, sir. Anyway, this was no witchcraft—it was a bona fide spirit séance, with ectoplasm."

"Hum!" snorted the judge. "Witchcraft, spiritism! Did it ever occur to you that they might be one and the same thing?"

"Inasmuch as I never believed in either of them, it never did occur to me."

Judge Pursuivant finished his drink and wiped his mustache. "Skepticism does not become you too well, Mr. Wills,

if you will pardon my frankness. In any case, you saw something very werewolfish indeed, not an hour ago. Isn't that the truth?"

"It was some kind of a trick," I insisted stubbornly.

"A trick that almost killed you and made you run for your life?"

I shook my head. "I know I saw the thing," I admitted. "I even felt it." My eyes dropped to the bruised knuckles of my right hand. "Yet I was fooled—as a magician, I know all about fooling. There can be no such thing as a werewolf."

"Have a drink," coaxed Judge Pursuivant, exactly as if I had had none yet. With big, deft hands he poured whisky, then soda, into my glass and gave the mixture a stirring shake. "Now then," he continued, sitting back in his chair once more, "the time has come to speak of many things."

He paused, and I, gazing over the rim of that welcome glass, thought how much he looked like a rosy blond walrus.

"I'm going to show you," he announced, "that a man can turn into a beast, and back again."

9. "To a Terrified Victim He Is Doom Itself."

HE LEANED toward the bookshelf beside him, pawed for a moment, then laid two sizable volumes on the desk between us.

"If this were a fantasy tale, Mr. Wills," he said with a hint of one of his smiles, "I would place before you an unthinkable rare book—one that offered, in terms too brilliant and compelling for argument, the awful secrets of the universe, past, present and to come."

He paused to polish a pair of pince-nez and to clamp them upon the bridge of his broad nose.

"However," he resumed, "this is reality, sober if uneasy. And I give you, not some forgotten grimoire out of the mystic past, but two works by two recognized and familiar authorities."

I eyed the books. "May I see?"

For answer he thrust one of them, some six hundred pages in dark blue cloth, across the desk and into my hands. "*Thirty Years of Psychical Research*, by the late Charles Richet, French master in the spirit-investigation field," he informed me. "Faithfully and interestingly translated by Stanley De Brath. Published here in America, in 1923."

I took the book and opened it. "I knew Professor Richet, slightly. Years ago, when I was just beginning this sort of thing, I was entertained by him in London. He introduced me to Conan Doyle."

"Then you're probably familiar with his book. Yes? Well, the other," and he took up the second volume, almost as large as the Richet and bound in light buff, "is by Montague Summers, whom I call the premier demonologist of today. He's gathered all the lycanthropy-lore available."

I had read Mr. Summers' *Geography of Witchcraft* and his two essays on the vampire, and I made bold to say so.

"This is a companion volume to them," Judge Pursuivant told me, opening the book. "It is called *The Werewolf*." He scrutinized the flyleaf. "Published in 1934 — thoroughly modern, you see. Here's a bit of Latin, Mr. Wills: *Intra-bunt lupi rapaces in vos, non parcentes gregi*."

I crinkled my brow in the effort to recall my high school Latin, then began slowly to translate, a word at a time: "Enter hungry wolves——"

"Save that scholarship," Judge Pursuivant broke in. "It's more early Scripture, though not so early as the bit about the hairy ones—vulgate for a passage from

the Acts of the Apostles, twentieth chapter, twenty-ninth verse. 'Ravenous wolves shall enter among you, not sparing the flock.' Apparently that disturbing possibility exists even today."

He leafed through the book. "Do you know," he asked, "that Summers gives literally dozens of instances of lycanthropy, things that are positively known to have happened?"

I took another sip of whisky and water. "Those are only legends, surely."

"They are nothing of the sort!" The judge's eyes protruded even more in his earnestness, and he tapped the pages with an excited forefinger. "There are four excellent cases listed in his chapter on France alone—sworn to, tried and sentenced by courts——"

"But weren't they during the Middle Ages?" I suggested.

He shook his great head. "No, during the Sixteenth Century, the peak of the Renaissance. Oh, don't smile at the age, Mr. Wills. It produced Shakespeare, Bacon, Montaigne, Galileo, Leonardo, Martin Luther; Descartes and Spinoza were its legitimate children, and Voltaire builded upon it. Yet werewolves were known, seen, convicted——"

"Convicted on what grounds?" I interrupted quickly, for I was beginning to reflect his warmth.

For answer he turned more pages. "Here is the full account of the case of Stubbe Peter, or Peter Stumpf," he said. "A contemporary record, telling of Stumpf's career in and out of wolf-form, his capture in the very act of shifting shape, his confession and execution—all near Cologne in the year 1589. Listen."

He read aloud: "Witnesses that this is true. Tyse Artyne. William Brewar. Adolf Staedt. George Bores. With divers others that have seen the same." Slamming the book shut, he looked up at me, the twinkle coming back into his

spectacled eyes. "Well, Mr. Wills? How do those names sound to you?"

"Why, like the names of honest German citizens."

"Exactly. Honest, respectable, solid. And their testimony is hard to pass off with a laugh, even at this distance in time, eh?"

He had almost made me see those witnesses, leather-jerkined and broad-breeched, with heavy jaws and squinting eyes, taking their turn at the quill pen with which they set their names to that bizarre document. "With divers others that have seen the same"—perhaps too frightened to hold pen or make signature. . . .

"Still," I said slowly, "Germany of the Renaissance, the Sixteenth Century; and there have been so many changes since."

"Werewolves have gone out of fashion, you mean? Ah, you admit that they might have existed." He fairly beamed his triumph. "So have beards gone out of fashion, but they will sprout again if we lay down our razors. Let's go at it another way. Let's talk about materialization—ectoplasm—for the moment." He relaxed, and across his great girth his fingertips sought one another. "Suppose you explain, briefly and simply, what ectoplasm is considered to be."

I was turning toward the back of Richet's book. "It's in here, Judge Pursivant. To be brief and simple, as you say, certain mediums apparently exude an unclassified material called ectoplasm. This, at first light and vaporescent, becomes firm and takes shape, either upon the body of the medium or as a separate and living creature."

"And you don't believe in this phenomenon?" he prompted, with something of insistence.

"I have never said that I didn't," I replied truthfully, "even before my experience of this evening went so far toward

convincing me. But, with the examples I have seen, I felt that true scientific control was lacking. With all their science, most of the investigators trust too greatly."

Judge Pursuivant shook with gentle laughter. "They are doctors for the most part, and this honesty of theirs is a professional failing that makes them look for it in others. You—begging your pardon—are a magician, a professional deceiver, and you expect trickery in all whom you meet. Perhaps a good lawyer with trial experience, with a level head and a sense of competent material evidence for both sides, should attend these séances, eh?"

"You're quite right," I said heartily.

"But, returning to the subject, what else can be said about ectoplasm? That is, if it actually exists."

I had found in Richet's book the passage for which I had been searching. "It says here that bits of ectoplasm have been secured in rare instances, and that some of these have been examined microscopically. There were traces of fatty tissue, bacterial forms and epithelium."

"Ah! Those were the findings of Schrenck-Notzing. A sound man and a brilliant one, hard to corrupt or fool. It makes ectoplasm sound organic, does it not?"

I NODDED agreement, and my head felt heavy, as if full of sober and important matters. "As for me," I went on, "I never have had much chance to examine the stuff. Whenever I get hold of an ectoplasmic hand, it melts like butter."

"They generally do," the judge commented, "or so the reports say. Yet they themselves are firm and strong when they touch or seize."

"Right, sir."

"It's when attacked, or even frightened, as with a camera flashlight, that the ecto-

plasm vanishes or is reabsorbed?" he prompted further.

"So Richet says here," I agreed once more, "and so I have found."

"Very good. Now," and his manner took on a flavor of the legal, "I shall sum up:

"Ectoplasm is put forth by certain spirit mediums, who are mysteriously adapted for it, under favorable conditions that include darkness, quiet, self-confidence. It takes form, altering the appearance of the medium or making up a separate body. It is firm and strong, but vanishes when attacked or frightened. Right so far, eh?"

"Right," I approved.

"Now, for the word *medium* substitute *wizard*." His grin burst out again, and he began to mix a third round of drinks. "A wizard, having darkness and quiet and being disposed to change shape, exudes a material that gives him a new shape and character. Maybe it is bestial, to match a fierce or desperate spirit within. There may be a shaggy pelt, a sharp muzzle, taloned paws and rending fangs. To a terrified victim he is doom itself. But to a brave adversary, facing and fighting him——"

He flipped his way through Summers' book, as I had with Richet's. "Listen: '... the shape of the werewolf will be removed if he be reproached by name as a werewolf, or if again he be thrice addressed by his Christian name, or struck three blows on the forehead with a knife, or that three drops of blood should be drawn.' Do you see the parallels, man? Shouted at, bravely denounced, or slightly wounded, his false beast-substance fades from him." He flung out his hands, as though appealing to a jury. "I marvel nobody ever thought of it before."

"But nothing so contrary to nature has a natural explanation," I objected, and

very idiotic the phrase sounded in my own ears.

He laughed, and I could not blame him. "I'll confound you with another of your own recent experiences. What could seem more contrary to nature than the warmth and greenness of the inside of Devil's Croft? And what is more simply natural than the hot springs that make it possible?"

"Yet, an envelope of bestiality, beast-muzzle on human face, beast-paws on human hands——"

"I can support that by more werewolf-lore. I don't even have to open Summers, everyone has heard the story. A wolf attacks a traveler, who with his sword lops off a paw. The beast howls and flees, and the paw it leaves behind is a human hand."

"That's an old one, in every language."

"Probably because it happened so often. There's your human hand, with the beast-paw forming upon and around it, then vanishing like wounded ectoplasm. Where's the weak point, Wills? Name it, I challenge you."

I felt the glass shake in my hand, and a chilly wind brushed my spine. "There's one point," I made myself say. "You may think it a slender one, even a quibble. But ectoplasms make human forms, not animal."

"How do you know they don't make animal forms?" Judge Pursuivant crowed, leaning forward across the deck. "Because, of the few you've seen and disbelieved, only human faces and bodies showed? My reply is there in your hands. Open Richet's book to page 545, Mr. Wills. Page 545 . . . got it? Now, the passage I marked, about the medium Burgik. Read it aloud."

He sank back into his chair once more, waiting in manifest delight. I found the place, underscored with pencil, and my voice was hoarse as I obediently read:

"My trouser leg was strongly pulled and a strange, ill-defined form that seemed to have paws like those of a dog or small monkey climbed on my knee. I could feel its weight, very light, and something like the muzzle of an animal touched my cheek."

"There you are, Wills," Judge Pursuivant was crying. "Notice that it happened in Warsaw, close to the heart of the werewolf country. Hmmm, reading that passage made you sweat a bit—remembering what you saw in the Devil's Croft, eh?"

I flung down the book.

"You've done much toward convincing me," I admitted. "I'd rather have the superstitious peasant's belief, though, the one I've always scoffed at."

"Rationalizing the business didn't help, then? It did when I explained the Devil's Croft and the springs."

"But the springs don't chase you with sharp teeth. And, as I was saying, the peasant had a protection that the scientist lacks—trust in his crucifix and his Bible."

"Why shouldn't he have that trust, and why shouldn't you?" Again the judge was rummaging in his book-case. "Those symbols of faith gave him what is needed, a strong heart to drive back the menace, whether it be wolf-demon or ectoplasmic bogey. Here, my friend."

He laid a third book on the desk. It was a Bible, red-edged and leather-backed, worn from much use.

"Have a read at that while you finish your drink," he advised me. "*The Gospel According to St. John* is good, and it's already marked. Play you're a peasant, hunting for comfort."

Like a dutiful child I opened the Bible to where a faded purple ribbon lay between the pages. But already Judge Pursuivant was quoting from memory:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. . . ."

10. *"Blood-lust and Compassion."*

IT MAY seem incredible that later in the night I slept like a dead pig; yet I had reason.

First of all there was the weariness that had followed my dangers and exertions; then Judge Pursuivant's whisky and logic combined to reassure me; finally, the leather couch in his study, its surface comfortably hollowed by much reclining thereon, was a sedative in itself. He gave me two quilts, very warm and very light, and left me alone. I did not stir until a rattle of breakfast dishes awakened me.

William, the judge's servant, had carefully brushed my clothes. My shoes also showed free of mud, though they still felt damp and clammy. The judge himself furnished me with a clean shirt and socks, both items very loose upon me, and lent me his razor.

"Some friends of yours called during the night," he told me dryly.

"Friends?"

"Yes, from the town. Five of them, with ropes and guns. They announced very definitely that they intended to decorate the flagpole in the public square with your corpse. There was also some informal talk about drinking your blood. We may have vampires as well as werewolves hereabouts."

I almost cut my lip with the razor. "How did you get rid of them?" I asked quickly. "They must have followed my tracks."

"Lucky there was more snow after we got in," he replied, "and they came here

only as a routine check-up. They must have visited every house within miles. Oh, turning them away was easy. I feigned wild enthusiasm for the manhunt, and asked if I couldn't come along."

He smiled reminiscently, his mustache stirring like a rather genial blond snake.

"Then what?" I prompted him, dabbing on more lather.

"Why, they were delighted. I took a rifle and spent a few hours on the trail. You weren't to be found at all, so we returned to town. Excitement reigns there, you can believe."

"What kind of excitement?"

"Blood-lust and compassion. Since Constable O'Bryant is wounded, his younger brother, a strong advocate of your immediate capture and execution, is serving as a volunteer guardian of the peace. He's acting on an old appointment by his brother as deputy, to serve without pay. He told the council—a badly scared group—that he has sent for help to the county seat, but I am sure he did nothing of the kind. Meanwhile, the Croft is surrounded by scouts, who hope to catch you sneaking out of it. And the women of the town are looking after Susan Gird and your friend, the *Herr Doktor*."

I had finished shaving. "How is Doctor Zoberg?" I inquired through the towel.

"Still pretty badly shaken up. I tried to get in and see him, but it was impossible. I understand he went out for a while, early in the evening, but almost collapsed. Just now he is completely surrounded by cooing old ladies with soup and herb tea. Miss Gird was feeling much better, and talked to me for a while. I'm not really on warm terms with the town, you know; people think it's indecent for me to live out here alone and not give them a chance to gossip about me. So I was pleasurably surprised to get

a kind word from Miss Susan. She told me, very softly for fear someone might overhear, that she hopes you aren't caught. She is sure that you did not kill her father."

"We went into his dining-room, where William offered pancakes, fried bacon and the strongest black coffee I ever tasted. In the midst of it all, I put down my fork and faced the judge suddenly. He grinned above his cup.

"Well, Mr. Wills? 'Stung by the splendor of a sudden thought'—all you need is a sensitive hand clasped to your inspired brow."

"You said," I reminded him, "that Susan Gird is sure that I didn't kill her father."

"So I did."

"She told you that herself. She also seemed calm, self-contained, instead of in mourning for——"

"Oh, come, come!" He paused to shift a full half-dozen cakes to his plate and skilfully drenched them with syrup. "That's rather ungrateful of you, Mr. Wills, suspecting her of parricide."

"Did I say that?" I protested, feeling my ears turning bright red.

"You would have if I hadn't broken your sentence in the middle," he accused, and put a generous portion of pancake into his mouth. As he chewed he twinkled at me through his pince-nez, and I felt unaccountably foolish.

"If Susan Gird had truly killed her father," he resumed, after swallowing, "she would be more adroitly theatrical. She would weep, swear vengeance on his murderer, and be glad to hear that someone else had been accused of the crime. She would even invent details to help incriminate that someone else."

"Perhaps she doesn't know that she killed him," I offered.

"Perhaps not. You mean that a new mind, as well as a new body, may invest the werewolf—or ectoplasmic medium—at time of change."

I jerked my head in agreement.

"Then Susan Gird, as she is normally, must be innocent. Come, Mr. Wills! Would you blame poor old Doctor Jekyll for the crimes of his *alter ego*, Mr. Hyde?"

"I wouldn't want to live in the same house with Doctor Jekyll."

Judge Pursuivant burst into a roar of laughter, at which William, bringing fresh supplies from the kitchen, almost dropped his tray. "So romance enters the field of psychic research!" the judge crowed at me.

I stiffened, outraged. "Judge Pursuivant, I certainly did not——"

"I know, you didn't say it, but again I anticipated you. So it's not the thought of her possible unconscious crime, but the chance of comfortable companionship that perplexes you." He stopped laughing suddenly. "I'm sorry, Wills. Forgive me. I shouldn't laugh at this, or indeed at any aspect of the whole very serious business."

I could hardly take real offense at the man who had rescued and sheltered me, and I said so. We finished breakfast, and he sought his overcoat and wide hat.

"I'm off for town again," he announced. "There are one or two points to be settled there, for your safety and my satisfaction. Do you mind being left alone? There's an interesting lot of books in my study. You might like to look at a copy of Dom Calmet's *Dissertations*, if you read French; also a rather slovenly *Wicked Bible*, signed by Pierre De Lancre. J. W. Wickwar, the witchcraft authority, thinks that such a thing does not exist, but I know of two others. Or, if

you feel that you're having enough of demonology in real life, you will find a whole row of light novels, including most of P. G. Wodehouse." He held out his hand in farewell. "William will get you anything you want. There's tobacco and a choice of pipes on my desk. Whisky, too, though you don't look like the sort that drinks before noon."

With that he was gone, and I watched him from the window. He moved sturdily across the bright snow to a shed, slid open its door and entered. Soon there emerged a sedan, old but well-kept, with the judge at the wheel. He drove away down a snow-filled road toward town.

I did not know what to envy most in him, his learning, his assurance or his good-nature. The assurance, I decided once; then it occurred to me that he was in nothing like the awkward position I held. He was only a sympathetic ally—but why was he that, even? I tried to analyze his motives, and could not.

SITTING down in his study, I saw on the desk the Montague Summers book on werewolves. It lay open at page 111, and my eyes lighted at once upon a passage underscored in ink—apparently some time ago, for the mark was beginning to rust a trifle. It included a quotation from *Resurrection of Decayed Intelligence*, written by Richard Rowlands in 1605:

"... *were-wolues* are certaine sorcerers, who hauvin annoynted their bodyes, with an oyntment which they make by the instinct of the deuill; and putting on a certain enchanted girdel, do not only vnto the view of others seeme as wolues, but to their own thinking haue both the shape and the nature of wolues, so long as they weare the said girdel. And they do dispose theselves as uery wolues, in wurring and killing, and moste of humaine creatures."

W. T.—7

This came to the bottom of the page, where someone, undoubtedly Pursuivant, had written: "Ointment and girdle sound as if they might have a scientific explanation," And, in the same script, but smaller, the following notes filled the margin beside:

Possible Werewolf Motivations

- I. Involuntary lycanthropy.
 1. Must have blood to drink (connection with vampirism?).
 2. Must have secrecy.
 3. Driven to desperation by contemplating horror of own position.
- II. Voluntary lycanthropy.
 1. Will to do evil.
 2. Will to exert power through fear.
- III. Contributing factors to becoming werewolf.
 1. Loneliness and dissatisfaction.
 2. Hunger for forbidden foods (human flesh, etc.).
 3. Scorn and hate of fellow men, general or specific.
 4. Occult curiosity.
 5. Simon-pure insanity (Satanist complex).

Are any or all of these traits to be found in werewolf

Find one and ask it.

THAT was quite enough lycanthropy for the present, so far as I was concerned. I drew a book of Mark Twain from the shelf—I seem to remember it as *Tom Sawyer Abroad*—and read all the morning. Noon came, and I was about to ask the judge's negro servant for some lunch, when he appeared in the door of the study.

"Someone with a message, sah," he announced, and drew aside to admit Susan Gird.

I fairly sprang to my feet, dropping my book upon the desk. She advanced slowly into the room, her pale face grave but friendly. I saw that her eyes were darkly circled, and that her cheeks showed gaunt, as if with strain and weariness. She put out a hand, and I took it.

"A message?" I repeated William's words.

"Why, yes." She achieved a smile, and

I was glad to see it, for both our sakes. "Judge Pursuivant got me to one side and said for me to come here. You and I are to talk the thing over."

"You mean, last night?" She nodded, and I asked further, "How did you get here?"

"Your car. I don't drive very well, but I managed."

I asked her to sit down and talk.

She told me that she remembered being in the parlor, with Constable O'Bryant questioning me. At the time she had had difficulty remembering even the beginning of the séance, and it was not until I had been taken away that she came to realize what had happened to her father. That, of course, distressed and distracted her further, and even now the whole experience was wretchedly hazy to her.

"I do recall sitting down with you," she said finally, after I had urged her for the twentieth time to think hard. "You chained me, yes, and Doctor Zoberg. Then yourself. Finally I seemed to float away, as if in a dream. I'm not even sure about how long it was."

"Had the light been out very long?" I asked craftily.

"The light out?" she echoed, patently mystified. "Oh, of course. The light was turned out, naturally. I don't remember, but I suppose you attended to that."

"I asked to try you," I confessed. "I didn't touch the lamp until after you had seemed to drop off to sleep."

She did recall to memory her father's protest at his manacles, and Doctor Zoberg's gentle inquiry if she were ready. That was all.

"How is Doctor Zoberg?" I asked her.

"Not very well, I'm afraid. He was exhausted by the experience, of course, and for a time seemed ready to break down. When the trouble began about

you—the crowd gathered at the town hall—he gathered his strength and went out, to see if he could help defend or rescue you. He was gone about an hour and then he returned, bruised about the face. Somebody of the mob had handled him roughly, I think. He's resting at our place now, with a hot compress on his eye."

"Good man!" I applauded. "At least he did his best for me."

She was not finding much pleasure in her memories, however, and I suggested a change of the subject. We had lunch together, egg sandwiches and coffee, then played several hands of casino. Tiring of that, we turned to the books and she read aloud to me from Keats. Never has *The Eve of St. Agnes* sounded better to me. Evening fell, and we were preparing to take yet another meal—a meat pie, which William assured us was one of his culinary triumphs—when the door burst open and Judge Pursuivant came in.

"You've been together all the time?" he asked us at once.

"Why, yes," I said.

"Is that correct, Miss Susan? You've been in the house, every minute?"

"That is right," she seconded me.

"Then," said the judge. "You two are cleared, at last."

He paused, looking from Susan's questioning face to mine, then went on:

"That rending beast-thing in the Croft got another victim, not more than half an hour ago. O'Bryant was feeling better, ready to get back on duty. His deputy-brother, anxious to get hold of Wills first, for glory or vengeance, ventured into the place, just at dusk. He came out in a little while, torn and bitten almost to pieces, and died as he broke clear of the cedar hedge."

The thrilling climax of this story, with the confession and capture of the werewolf, will be told in the exciting chapters that bring the tale to a close in next month's issue. Reserve your copy at your magazine dealer's now.

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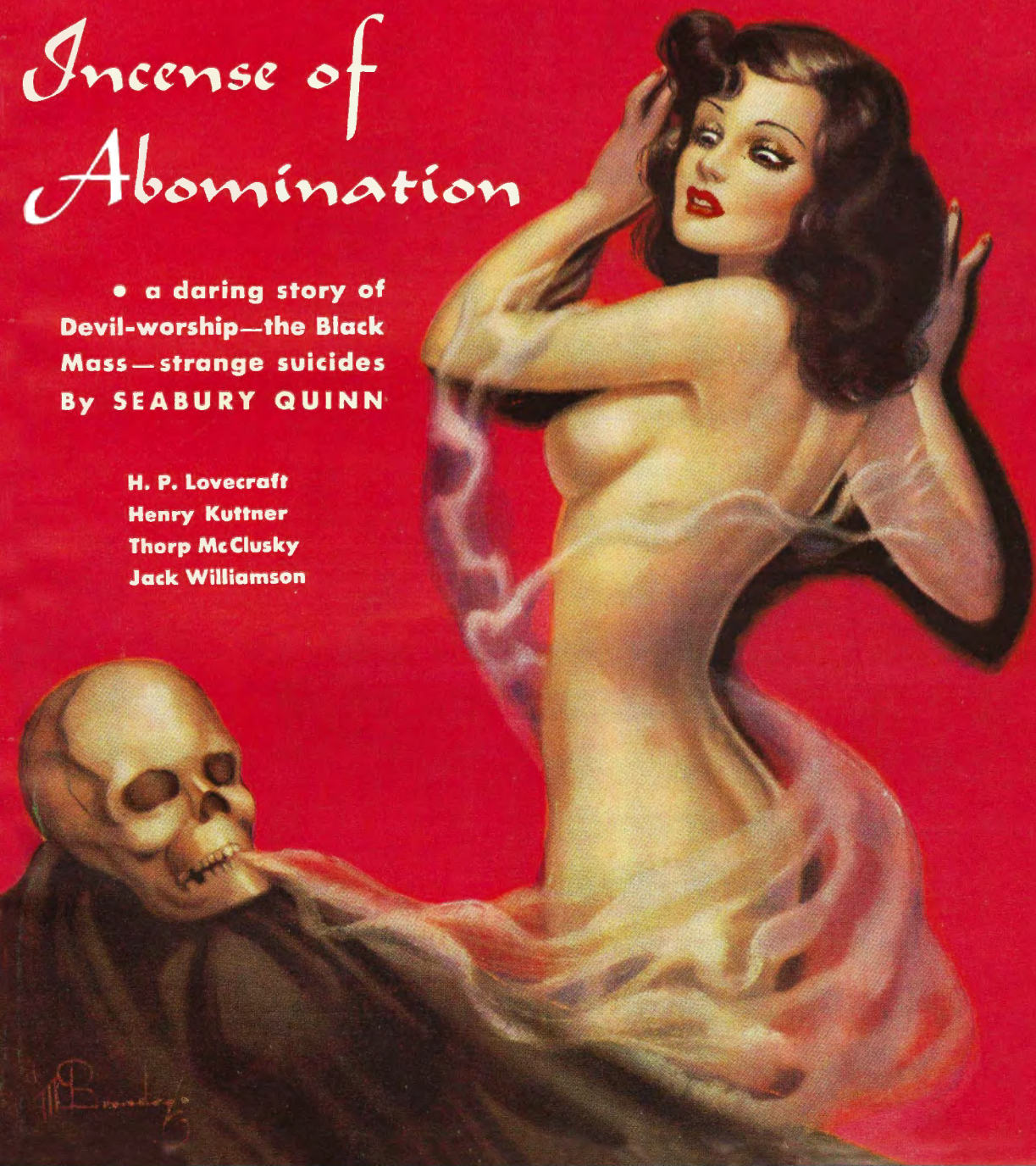
MARCH

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Incense of Abomination

• a daring story of
Devil-worship—the Black
Mass—strange suicides
By SEABURY QUINN

H. P. Lovecraft
Henry Kuttner
Thorp McClusky
Jack Williamson





"The strange witch ointments gave it
beast form and beast heart."

The Hairy Ones Shall Dance

By GANS T. FIELD

*A novel of a hideous, stark horror that struck during a spirit séance—a tale of
terror and sudden death, and the frightful thing that
laired in the Devil's Croft*

The Story Thus Far:

TALBOT WILLS, the narrator, is a former stage magician. Skeptical of psychic phenomena, he goes with Doctor Zoberg to an isolated hamlet,

where, says Zoberg, lives a medium who will prove the case for spiritism.

The medium is an attractive girl, Susan Gird. At a séance, a bestial shape appears in the darkened room and kills John Gird, the medium's father. The town

This story began in **WEIRD TALES** for January

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constable accuses Wills, as the only person able to escape the manacles which confined everyone in the room. A mob gathers to lynch the supposed murderer, and he manages to escape from a cell, fleeing for shelter to a grove on the edge of town. This is called the Devil's Croft, and custom and local law forbid anyone to enter it.

Once inside, he finds, though a blizzard rages without, the grove is as warm and green as the tropics. In its depths he encounters and fights with the same beast-shape that killed John Gird. By a lucky blow he stuns it, and is horrified to see it turning gradually human. He flees from the grove and meets Judge Keith Pursuivant, a scholarly recluse, who shelters him and shows him, by logic and by quotation of distinguished authorities, that a werewolf can be explained by the spiritist theory of ectoplasmic materialization.

The following day Judge Pursuivant goes to town to observe conditions, and sends Susan Gird to his home to talk to Wills. The two are beginning to be drawn to each other, though in Wills' mind lingers the possibility that Susan Gird may have a complex personality that sometimes materializes the beast-thing.

Returning from town, the judge tells them that the mysterious monster, apparently still in the forbidden grove, has claimed another victim.

The story continues:

11. *"To Meet that Monster Face to Face!"*

I THINK that both Susan and I fairly reeled before this news, like actors registering surprise in an old-fashioned melodrama. As for Judge Pursuivant, he turned to the table, cut a generous wedge of the meat pie and set it, all savory and steaming, on a plate for himself. His

calm zest for the good food gave us others steadiness again, so that we sat down and even ate a little as he described his day in town.

He had found opportunity to talk to Susan in private, confiding in her about me and finally sending her to me; this, as he said, so that we would convince each other of our respective innocences. It was purely an inspiration, for he had had no idea, of course, that such conviction would turn out so final. Thereafter he made shift to enter the Gird house and talk to Doctor Zoberg.

That worthy he found sitting somewhat limply in the parlor, with John Gird's coffin in the next room. Zoberg, the judge reported, was mystified about the murder and anxious to bring to justice the townsfolk — there were more than one, it seemed — who had beaten him. Most of all, however, he was concerned about the charges against me.

"His greatest anxiety is to prove you innocent," Judge Pursuivant informed me. "He intends to bring the best lawyer possible for your defense, is willing even to assist in paying the fee. He also swears that character witnesses can be brought to testify that you are the most peaceable and law-abiding man in the country."

"That's mighty decent of him," I said. "According to your reasoning of this morning, his attitude proves him innocent, too."

"What reasoning was that?" asked Susan, and I was glad that the judge continued without answering her.

"I was glad that I had sent Miss Susan on. If your car had remained there, Mr. Wills, Doctor Zoberg might have driven off in it to rally your defenses."

"Not if I know him," I objected. "The whole business, what of the mystery and occult significances, will hold him right on the spot. He's relentlessly

curious and, despite his temporary collapse, he's no coward."

"I agree with that," chimed in Susan.

As for my pursuers of the previous night, the judge went on, they had been roaming the snow-covered streets in twos and threes, heavily armed for the most part and still determined to punish me for killing their neighbor. The council was too frightened or too perplexed to deal with the situation, and the constable was still in bed, with his brother assuming authority, when Judge Pursuivant made his inquiries. The judge went to see the wounded man, who very pluckily determined to rise and take up his duties again.

"I'll arrest the man who plugged me," O'Bryant had promised grimly, "and that kid brother of mine can quit playing policeman."

The judge applauded these sentiments, and brought him hot food and whisky, which further braced his spirits. In the evening came the invasion by the younger O'Bryant of the Devil's Croft, and his resultant death at the claws and teeth of what prowled there.

"His throat was so torn open and filled with blood that he could not speak," the judge concluded, "but he pointed back into the timber, and then tried to trace something in the snow with his finger. It looked like a wolf's head, with pointed nose and ears. He died before he finished."

"You saw him come out?" I asked.

"No. I'd gone back to town, but later I saw the body, and the sketch in the snow."

He finished his dinner and pushed back his chair. "Now," he said heartily, "it's up to us."

"Up to us to do what?" I inquired.

"To meet that monster face to face," he replied. "There are three of us and, so far as I can ascertain, but one of the

enemy." Both Susan and I started to speak, but he held up his hand, smiling. "I know without being reminded that the odds are still against us, because the one enemy is fierce and blood-drinking, and can change shape and character. Maybe it can project itself to a distance—which makes it all the harder, both for us to face it and for us to get help."

"I know what you mean by that last," I nodded gloomily. "If there were ten thousand friendly constables in the neighborhood, instead of a single hostile one, they wouldn't believe us."

"Right," agreed Judge Pursuivant. "We're like the group of perplexed mortals in *Dracula*, who had only their own wits and weapons against a monster no more forbidding than ours."

It is hard to show clearly how his constant offering of parallels and rationalizations comforted us. Only the unknown and unknowable can terrify completely. We three were even cheerful over a bottle of wine that William fetched and poured out in three glasses. Judge Pursuivant gave us a toast—"May wolves go hungry!"—and Susan and I drank it gladly.

"Don't forget what's on our side," said the judge, putting down his glass. "I mean the stedfast and courageous heart, of which I preached to Wills last night, and which we can summon from within us any time and anywhere. The werewolf, dauntlessly faced, loses its dread; and I think we are the ones to face it. Now we're ready for action."

I said that I would welcome any kind of action whatsoever, and Susan touched my arm as if in endorsement of the remark. Judge Pursuivant's spectacles glittered in approval.

"You two will go into the Devil's Croft," he announced. "I'm going back to town once more."

"Into the Devil's Croft!" we almost shouted, both in the same shocked breath.

"Of course. Didn't we just get through with the agreement all around that the lycanthrope can and must be met face to face? Offense is the best defense, as perhaps one hundred thousand athletic trainers have reiterated."

"I've already faced the creature once," I reminded him. "As for appearing dauntless, I doubt my own powers of deceit."

"You shall have a weapon," he said. "A fire gives light, and we know that such things must have darkness—such as it finds in the midst of that swampy wood. So fill your pockets with matches, both of you."

"How about a gun?" I asked, but he shook his head.

"We don't want the werewolf killed. That would leave the whole business in mystery, and yourself probably charged with another murder. He'd return to his human shape, you know, the moment he was hurt even slightly."

Susan spoke, very calmly: "I'm ready to go into the Croft, Judge Pursuivant."

He clapped his hands loudly, as if applauding in a theater. "Bravo, my dear, bravo! I see Mr. Wills sets his jaw. That means he's ready to go with you. Very well, let us be off."

He called to William, who at his orders brought three lanterns—sturdy old-fashioned affairs, protected by strong wire nettings—and filled them with oil. We each took one and set out. It had turned clear and frosty once more, and the moon shone too brightly for my comfort, at least. However, as we approached the grove, we saw no sentinels; they could hardly be blamed for deserting, after the fate of the younger O'Bryant.

We gained the shadow of the outer cedars unchallenged. Here Judge Pursuivant called a halt, produced a match from

his overcoat pocket and lighted our lanterns all around. I remember that we struck a fresh light for Susan's lantern; we agreed that, silly as the three-on-a-match superstition might be, this was no time or place to tempt Providence.

"Come on," said Judge Pursuivant then, and led the way into the darkest part of the immense thicket.

12. "We Are Here at His Mercy."

WE FOLLOWED Judge Pursuivant, Susan and I, without much of a thought beyond an understandable dislike for being left alone on the brink of the timber. It was a slight struggle to get through the close-set cedar hedge, especially for Susan, but beyond it we soon caught up with the judge. He strode heavily and confidently among the trees, his lantern held high to shed light upon broad, polished leaves and thick, wet stems. The moist warmth of the grove's interior made itself felt again, and the judge explained again and at greater length the hot springs that made possible this surprising condition. All the while he kept going. He seemed to know his way in that forbidden fastness—indeed, he must have explored it many times to go straight to his destination.

That destination was a clearing, in some degree like the one where I had met and fought with my hairy pursuer on the night before. This place had, however, a great tree in its center, with branches that shot out in all directions to hide away the sky completely. By straining the ears one could catch a faint murmur of water—my scalding stream, no doubt. Around us were the thick-set trunks of the forest, filled in between with brush and vines, and underfoot grew velvety moss.

"This will be our headquarters position," said the judge. "Wills, help me

gather wood for a fire. Break dead branches from the standing trees—never mind picking up wood from the ground, it will be too damp."

Together we collected a considerable heap and, crumpling a bit of paper in its midst, he kindled it.

"Now, then," he went on, "I'm heading for town. You two will stay here and keep each other company."

He took our lanterns, blew them out and ran his left arm through the loops of their handles.

"I'm sure that nothing will attack you in the light of the fire. You're bound to attract whatever skulks hereabouts, however. When I come back, we ought to be prepared to go into the final act of our little melodrama."

He touched my hand, bowed to Susan, and went tramping away into the timber. The thick leafage blotted his lantern-light from our view before his back had been turned twenty seconds.

Susan and I gazed at each other, and smiled rather uneasily.

"It's warm," she breathed, and took off her cloak. Dropping it upon one of the humped roots of the great central tree, she sat down on it with her back to the trunk. "What kind of a tree is this?"

I gazed up at the gnarled stem, or as much of it as I could see in the firelight. Finally I shook my head.

"I don't know—I'm no expert," I admitted. "At least it's very big, and undoubtedly very old—the sort of tree that used to mark a place of sacrifice."

At the word "sacrifice," Susan lifted her shoulders as if in distaste. "You're right, Talbot. It would be something grim and Druid-like." She began to recite, half to herself:

That tree in whose dark shadow
The ghastly priest doth reign,
The priest who slew the slayer
And shall himself be slain.

"Macaulay," I said at once. Then, to get her mind off of morbid things, "I had to recite *The Lays of Ancient Rome* in school, when I was a boy. I wish you hadn't mentioned it."

"You mean, because it's an evil omen?" She shook her head, and contrived a smile that lighted up her pale face. "It's not that, if you analyze it. 'Shall himself be slain'—it sounds as if the enemy's fate is sealed."

I nodded, then spun around sharply, for I fancied I heard a dull crashing at the edge of the clearing. Then I went here and there, gathering wood enough to keep our fire burning for some time. One branch, a thick, straight one, I chose from the heap and leaned against the big tree, within easy reach of my hand.

"That's for a club," I told Susan, and she half shrunk, half stiffened at the implication.

We fell to talking about Judge Pursuivant, the charm and the enigma that invested him. Both of us felt gratitude that he had immediately clarified our own innocence in the grisly slayings, but to both came a sudden inspiration, distasteful and disquieting. I spoke first:

"Susan! Why did the judge bring us here?"

"He said, to help face and defeat the monster. But—but——"

"Who is that monster?" I demanded. "What human being puts on a semi-bestial appearance, to rend and kill?"

"Y—you don't mean the judge?"

As I say, it had been in both our minds. We were silent, and felt shame and embarrassment.

"Look here," I went on earnestly after a moment; "perhaps we're being ungrateful, but we mustn't be unprepared. Think, Susan; nobody knows where Judge Pursuivant was at the time of your father's death, at the time I saw the thing in these woods," I broke off, remember-

ing how I had met the judge for the first time, so shortly after my desperate struggle with the point-eared demon. "Nobody knows where he was when the constable's brother was attacked and mortally wounded."

She gazed about fearfully. "Nobody," she added breathlessly, "knows where he is now."

I was remembering a conversation with him; he had spoken of books, mentioning a rare, a supposedly non-existent volume. What was it? . . . the *Wicked Bible*. And what was it I had once heard about that work?

It came back to me now, out of the sub-conscious brain-chamber where, apparently, one stores everything he hears or reads in idleness, and from which such items creep on occasion. It had been in Lewis Spence's *Encyclopedia of Occultism*, now on the shelf in my New York apartment.

The *Wicked Bible*, scripture for witches and wizards, from which magic-mongers of the Dark Ages drew their inspiration and their knowledge! And Judge Pursuivant had admitted to having one!

What had he learned from it? How had he been so glib about the science—yes, and the psychology—of being a werewolf?

"If what we suspect is true," I said to Susan, "we are here at his mercy. Nobody is going to come in here, not if horses dragged them. At his leisure he will fall upon us and tear us to pieces."

But, even as I spoke, I despised myself for my weak fears in her presence. I picked up my club and was comforted by its weight and thickness.

"I met that devil once," I said, studying cheer and confidence into my voice this time. "I don't think it relished the meeting any too much. Next time won't be any more profitable for it."

She smiled at me, as if in comradely

encouragement; then we both started and fell silent. There had risen, somewhere among the thickets, a long low whining.

I PUT out a foot, stealthily, as though fearful of being caught in motion. A quick kick flung more wood on the fire. I blinked in the light and felt the heat. Standing there, as a primitive man might have stood in his flame-guarded camp to face the horrors of the ancient world, I tried to judge by ear the direction of that whine.

It died, and I heard, perhaps in my imagination, a stealthy padding. Then the whining began again, from a new quarter and nearer.

I made myself step toward it. My shadow, leaping grotesquely among the tree trunks, almost frightened me out of my wits. The whine had changed into a crooning wail, such as that with which dogs salute the full moon. It seemed to plead, to promise; and it was coming closer to the clearing.

Once before I had challenged and taunted the thing with scornful words. Now I could not make my lips form a single syllable. Probably it was just as well, for I thought and watched the more. Something black and cautious was moving among the branches, just beyond the shrubbery that screened it from our firelight. I knew, without need of a clear view, what that black something was. I lifted my club to the ready.

The sound it made had become in some fashion articulate, though not human in any quality. There were no words to it, but it spoke to the heart. The note of plea and promise had become one of command—and not directed to me.

I found my own voice.

"Get out of here, you devil!" I roared at it, and threw my club. Even as I let go of it, I wished I had not. The bushes foiled my aim, and the missile crashed

among them and dropped to the mossy ground. The creature fell craftily silent. Then I felt sudden panic and regret at being left weaponless, and I retreated toward the fire.

"Susan," I said huskily, "give me another stick. Hurry!"

She did not move or stir, and I rummaged frantically among the heaped dry branches for myself. Catching up the first piece of wood that would serve, I turned to her with worried curiosity.

She was still seated upon the cloak-draped root, but she had drawn herself tense, like a cat before a mouse-hole. Her head was thrust forward, so far that her neck extended almost horizontally. Her dilated eyes were turned in the direction from which the whining and crooning had come. They had a strange clarity in them, as if they could pierce the twigs and leaves and meet there an answering, understanding gaze.

"Susan!" I cried.

Still she gave no sign that she heard me, if hear me she did. She leaned farther forward, as if ready to spring up and run. Once more the unbeastly wail rose from the place where our watcher was lurking.

Susan's lips trembled. From them came slowly and softly, then louder, a long-drawn answering howl.

"Aoooooooooooooooo! Aoooooooooooooooooooooooo!"

The stick almost fell from my hands. She rose, slowly but confidently. Her shoulders hunched high, her arms hung forward as though they wanted to reach to the ground. Again she howled:

"Aoooooooooooooooooooooooo!"

I saw that she was going to move across the clearing, toward the trees—through the trees. My heart seemed to twist into a knot inside me, but I could not let her do such a thing. I made a

quick stride and planted myself before her.

"Susan, you mustn't!"

She shrank back, her face turning slowly up to mine. Her back was to the fire, yet light rose in her eyes, or perhaps behind them; a green light, such as reflects in still forest pools from the moon. Her hands lifted suddenly, as though to repel me. They were half closed and the crooked fingers drawn stiff, like talons.

"Susan!" I coaxed her, yet again, and she made no answer but tried to slip sideways around me. I moved and headed her off, and she growled — actually growled, like a savage dog.

With my free hand I clutched her shoulder. Under my fingers her flesh was as taut as wire fabric. Then, suddenly, it relaxed into human tissue again, and she was standing straight. Her eyes had lost their weird light, they showed only dark and frightened.

"Talbot," she stammered. "Wh—what have I been doing?"

"Nothing, my dear," I comforted her. "It was nothing that we weren't able to fight back."

From the woods behind me came a throttling yelp, as of some hungry thing robbed of prey within its very grasp. Susan swayed, seemed about to drop, and I caught her quickly in my arms. Holding her thus, I turned my head and laughed over my shoulder.

"Another score against you!" I jeered at my enemy. "You didn't get her, not with all your filthy enchantments!"

Susan was beginning to cry, and I half led, half carried her back to the fireside. At my gesture she sat on her cloak again, as tractable as a child who repents of rebellion and tries to be obedient.

There were no more sounds from the timber. I could feel an emptiness there, as if the monster had slunk away, baffled.

13. "Light's Our Best Weapon."

NEITHER of us said anything for a while after that. I stoked up the fire, to be doing something, and it made us so uncomfortably warm that we had to crowd away from it. Sitting close against the tree-trunk, I began to imagine something creeping up the black lane of shadow it cast behind us to the edge of the clearing; and yet again I thought I heard noises. Club in hand, I went to investigate, and I was not disappointed in the least when I found nothing.

Finally Susan spoke. "This," she said, "is a new light on the thing."

"It's nothing to be upset about," I tried to comfort her.

"Not be upset!" She sat straight up, and in the light of the fire I could see a single pained line between her brows, deep and sharp as a chisel-gash. "Not when I almost turned into a beast!"

"How much of that do you remember?" I asked her.

"I was foggy in my mind, Talbot, almost as at the séance, but I remember being drawn—drawn to what was waiting out there." Her eyes sought the thickets on the far side of our blaze. "And it didn't seem horrible, but pleasant and welcome and—well, as if it were my kind. You," and she glanced quickly at me, then ashamedly away, "you were suddenly strange and to be avoided."

"Is that all?"

"It spoke to me," she went on in husky horror, "and I spoke to it."

I forbore to remind her that the only sound she had uttered was a wordless howl. Perhaps she did not know that—I hoped not. We said no more for another awkward time.

Finally she mumbled, "I'm not the kind of woman who cries easily; but I'd like to now."

"Go ahead," I said at once, and she

did, and I let her. Whether I took her into my arms, or whether she came into them of her own accord, I do not remember exactly; but it was against my shoulder that she finished her weeping, and when she had finished she did feel better.

"That somehow washed the fog and the fear out of me," she confessed, almost brightly.

It must have been a full hour later that rustlings rose yet again in the timber. So frequently had my imagination tricked me that I did not so much as glance up. Then Susan gave a little startled cry, and I sprang to my feet. Beyond the fire a tall, gray shape had become visible, with a pale glare of light around it.

"Don't be alarmed," called a voice I knew. "It is I—Otto Zoberg."

"Doctor!" I cried, and hurried to meet him. For the first time in my life, I felt that he was a friend. Our differences of opinion, once making companionship strained, had so dwindled to nothing in comparison to the danger I faced, and his avowed trust in me as innocent of murder.

"How are you?" I said, wringing his hand. "They say you were hurt by the mob."

"Ach, it was nothing serious," he reassured me. "Only this." He touched with his forefinger an eye, and I could see that it was bruised and swollen half shut. "A citizen with too ready a fist and too slow a mind has that to answer for."

"I'm partly responsible," I said. "You were trying to help me, I understand, when it happened."

MORE noise behind him, and two more shapes pushed into the clearing. I recognized Judge Pursuivant, nodding to me with his eyes bright under his wide hat-brim. The other man, angular, falcon-faced, one arm in a sling, I had also seen before. It was Constable O'Bry-

ant. I spoke to him, but he gazed past me, apparently not hearing.

Doctor Zoberg saw my perplexed frown, and he turned back toward the constable. Snapping long fingers in front of the great hooked nose, he whistled shrilly. O'Bryant started, grunted, then glared around as though he had been suddenly and rudely awakened.

"What's up?" he growled menacingly, and his sound hand moved swiftly to a holster at his side. Then his eyes found me, and with an oath he drew his revolver.

"Easy, Constable! Easy does it," soothed Judge Pursuivant, his own great hand clutching O'Bryant's wrist. "You've forgotten that I showed how Mr. Wills must be innocent."

"I've forgotten what we're here for at all," snapped O'Bryant, gazing around the clearing. "Hey, have I been drunk or something? I said that I'd never——"

"I'll explain," offered Zoberg. "The judge met me in town, and we came together to see you. Remember? You said you would like to avenge your brother's death, and came with us. Then, when you balked at the very edge of this Devil's Croft, I took the liberty of hypnotizing you."

"Huh? How did you do that?" growled the officer.

"With a look, a word, a motion of the hand," said Zoberg, his eyes twinkling. "Then you ceased all objections and came in with us."

Pursuivant clapped O'Bryant on the unwounded shoulder. "Sit down," he invited, motioning toward the roots of the tree.

The five of us gathered around the fire, like picknickers instead of allies against a supernatural monster. There, at Susan's insistence, I told of what had happened since Judge Pursuivant had left us. All listened with rapt attention, the constable

grunting occasionally, the judge clicking his tongue, and Doctor Zoberg in absolute silence.

It was Zoberg who made the first comment after I had finished. "This explains many things," he said.

"It don't explain a doggone thing," grumbled O'Bryant.

Zoberg smiled at him, then turned to Judge Pursuivant. "Your ectoplasmic theory of lycanthropy—such as you have explained it to me—is most interesting and, I think, valid. May I advance it a trifle?"

"In what way?" asked the judge.

"Ectoplasm, as you see it, forms the werewolf by building upon the medium's body. But is not ectoplasm more apt, according to the observations of many people, to draw completely away and form a separate and complete thing of itself? The thing may be beastly, as you suggest. Algernon Blackwood, the English writer of psychic stories, almost hits upon it in one of his 'John Silence' tales. He described an astral personality taking form and threatening harm while its physical body slept."

"I know the story you mean," agreed Judge Pursuivant. "*The Camp of the Dog*, I think it's called."

"Very well, then. Perhaps, while Miss Susan's body lay in a trance, securely handcuffed between Wills and myself——"

"Oh!" wailed Susan. "Then it was I, after all."

"It couldn't have been you," I told her at once.

"But it was! And, while I was at the judge's home with you, part of me met the constable's brother in this wood." She stared wildly around her.

"It might as well have been part of me," I argued, and O'Bryant glared at me as if in sudden support of that likelihood. But Susan shook her head.

"No, for which of us responded to the call of that thing out there?"

For the hundredth time she gazed fearfully through the fire at the bushes behind which the commanding whine had risen.

"I have within me," she said dully, "a nature that will break out, look and act like a beast-demon, will kill even my beloved father——"

"Please," interjected Judge Pursuivant earnestly, "you must not take responsibility upon yourself for what happened. If the ectoplasm engendered by you made up the form of the killer, the spirit may have come from without."

"How could it?" she asked wretchedly.

"How could Marthe Berand exude ectoplasm that formed a bearded, masculine body?" Pursuivant looked across to Zoberg. "Doctor, you surely know the famous 'Bien Boa' séance, and how the materialized entity spoke Arabic when the medium, a Frenchwoman, knew little or nothing of that language?"

Zoberg sat with bearded chin on lean hand. His joined brows bristled the more as he corrugated his forehead in thought. "We are each a thousand personalities," he said, sententiously if not comfortingly. "How can we rule them all, or rule even one of them?"

O'BRYANT said sourly that all this talk was too high flown for him to understand or to enjoy. He dared hope, however, that the case could never be tied up to Miss Susan Gird, whom he had known and liked since her babyhood.

"It can never do that," Zoberg said definitely. "No court or jury would convict her on the evidence we are offering against her."

I ventured an opinion: "While you are attempting to show that Susan is a werewolf, you are forgetting that some-

thing else was prowling around our fire, just out of sight."

"*Ach*, just out of sight!" echoed Zoberg. "That means you aren't sure what it was."

"Or even that there was anything," added Susan, so suddenly and strongly that I, at least, jumped.

"There was something, all right," I insisted. "I heard it."

"You thought you heard a sound behind the tree," Susan reminded me. "You looked, and there was nothing."

Everyone gazed at me, rather like staid adults at a naughty child. I said, ungraciously, that my imagination was no better than theirs, and that I was no easier to frighten. Judge Pursuivant suggested that we make a search of the surrounding woods, for possible clues.

"A good idea," approved Constable O'Bryant. "The ground's damp. We might find some sort of footprints."

"Then you stay here with Miss Susan," the judge said to him. "We others will circle around."

The gaunt constable shook his head. "Not much, mister. I'm in on whatever searching is done. I've got something to settle with whatever killed my kid brother."

"But there are only three lanterns," pointed out Judge Pursuivant. "We have to carry them—light's our best weapon."

Zoberg then spoke up, rather diffidently, to say that he would be glad to stay with Susan. This was agreed upon, and the other three of us prepared for the search.

I took the lantern from Zoberg's hand, nodded to the others, and walked away, among the trees.

14. "I Was—I Am—a Wolf!"

DELIBERATELY I had turned my face toward the section beyond the fire, for, as I have said repeatedly, it was there

that I had heard the movements and cries of the being that had so strongly moved and bewitched Susan. My heart whispered rather loudly that I must look for myself at its traces or lack of them, or for ever view myself with scorn.

Almost at once I found tracks, the booted tracks of my three allies. Shaking my lantern to make it flare higher, I went deeper among the clumps, my eyes quartering the damp earth. After a few moments I found what I had come to look for.

The marks were round and rather vague as to toe-positions, yet not so clear-cut as to be made by hoofs. Rather they suggested a malformed stump or a palm with no fingers, and they were deep enough to denote considerable weight; the tracks of my own shoes, next to them, were rather shallower. I bent for a close look, then straightened up, looked everywhere at once, and held my torch above my head to shed light all around; for I had suddenly felt eyes upon me.

I caught just a glimpse as of two points of light, fading away into some leafage and in the direction of the clearing, and toward them I made my way; but there was nothing there, and the only tracks underfoot were of shod human beings, myself or one of the others. I returned to my outward search, following the round tracks.

They were plainly of only two feet—there were no double impressions, like those of a quadruped—but I must have stalked along them for ten minutes when I realized that I had no way of telling whether they went forward or backward. I might be going away from my enemy instead of toward it. A close examination did me little good, and I further pondered that the creature would lurk near the clearing, not go so straight away. Thus arguing within myself, I doubled back.

Coming again close to the starting-point, I thought of a quick visit to the clearing and a comforting word or two with Susan and Zoberg. Surely I was almost there; but why did not the fire gleam through the trees? Were they out of wood? Perplexed, I quickened my pace. A gnarled tree grew in my path, its low branches heavily bearded with vines. Beyond this rose only the faintest of glows. I paused to push aside some strands and peer.

The fire had almost died, and by its light I but half saw two figures, one tall and one slender, standing together well to one side. They faced each other, and the taller—a seeming statue of wet-looking gray—held its companion by a shoulder. The other gray hand was stroking the smaller one's head, pouring grayness thereon.

I saw only this much, without stopping to judge or to wonder. Then I yelled, and sprang into the clearing. At my outcry the two fell apart and faced me. The smallest was Susan, who took a step in my direction and gave a little smothered whimper, as though she was trying to speak through a blanket. I ran to her side, and with a rough sweep of my sleeve I cleared from her face and head a mass of slimy, shiny jelly.

"You!" I challenged the other shape. "What have you been trying to do to her?"

For only a breathing-space it stood still, as featureless and clumsy as a half-formed figure of gray mud. Then darkness sprang out upon it, and hair. Eyes blazed at me, green and fearsome. A sharp muzzle opened to emit a snarl.

"Now I know you," I hurled at it. "I'm going to kill you."

And I charged.

Claws ripped at my head, missed and tore the cloth of my coat. One of my

arms shot around a lean, hairy middle with powerful muscles straining under its skin, and I drove my other fist for where I judged the pit of the stomach to be. Grappled, we fell and rolled over. The beast smell I remembered was all about us, and I knew that jaws were showing once again at my throat. I jammed my forearm between them, so far into the hinge of them that they could not close nor crush. My other hand clutched the skin of the throat, a great loose fistful, drew it taut and began to twist with all my strength. I heard a half-broken yelp of strangled pain, felt a slackening of the body that struggled against me, knew that it was trying to get away. But I managed to roll on top, straddling the thing.

"You're not so good on defense," I panted, and brought my other hand to the throat, for I had no other idea save to kill. Paws grasped and tore at my wrists. There was shouting at my back, in Susan's voice and several others. Hands caught me by the shoulders and tried to pull me up and away.

"No!" I cried. "This is it, the were-wolf!"

"It's Doctor Zoberg, you idiot," growled O'Bryant in my ear. "Come on, let him up."

"Yes," added Judge Pursuivant, "it's Doctor Zoberg, as you say; but a moment ago it was the monster we have been hunting."

I had been dragged upright by now, and so had Zoberg. He could only choke and glare for the time being, his fingers to his half-crushed throat. Pursuivant had moved within clutching distance of him, and was eyeing him as a cat eyes a mouse.

"Like Wills, I only pretended to search, then doubled back to watch," went on the judge. "I saw Zoberg and Miss Susan talking. He spoke quietly, rhythmically,

commandingly. She went into half a trance, and I knew she was hypnotized.

"As the fire died down, he began the change. Ectoplasm gushed out and over him. Before it took form, he began to smear some upon her. And Mr. Wills here came out of the woods and at him."

O'Bryant looked from the judge to Zoberg. Then he fumbled with his undamaged hand in a hip pocket, produced handcuffs and stepped forward. The accused man grinned through his beard, as if admitting defeat in some trifling game. Then he held out his wrists with an air of resignation and I, who had manacled them once, wondered again at their corded strength. The irons clicked shut upon one, then the other.

"You know everything now," said Zoberg, in a soft voice but a steady one. "I was—I am—a wolf; a wolf who hoped to mate with an angel."

His bright eyes rested upon Susan, who shrank back. Judge Pursuivant took a step toward the prisoner.

"There is no need for you to insult her," he said.

Zoberg grinned at him, with every long tooth agleam. "Do you want to hear my confession, or don't you?"

"Sure we want to hear it," grunted O'Bryant. "Leave him alone, judge, and let him talk." He glanced at me. "Got any paper, Mr. Wills? Somebody better take this down in writing."

I produced a wad of note-paper and a stub pencil. Placing it upon my knee, with the lantern for light, I scribbled, almost word for word, the tale that Doctor Zoberg told.

15. "And That Is the End."

"PERHAPS I was born what I am," he began. "At least, even as a lad I knew that there was a lust and a power for evil within me. Night called to me,

where it frightens most children. I would slip out of my father's house and run for miles, under the trees or across fields, with the moon for company. This was in Germany, of course, before the war."

"During the war——" began Judge Pursuivant.

"During the war, when most men were fighting, I was in prison." Again Zoberg grinned, briefly and without cheer. "I had found it easy and inspiring to kill persons, with a sense of added strength following. But they caught me and put me in what they called an asylum. I was supposed to be crazy. They confined me closely, but I, reading books in the library, grew to know what the change was that came upon me at certain intervals. I turned my attention to it, and became able to control the change, bringing it on or holding it off at will."

He looked at Susan again. "But I'm ahead of my story. Once, when I was at school, I met a girl—an American student of science and philosophy. She laughed at my wooing, but talked to me about spirits and psychical phenomena. That, my dear Susan, was your mother. When the end of the war brought so many new things, it also brought a different viewpoint toward many inmates of asylums. Some Viennese doctors, and later Sigmund Freud himself, found my case interesting. Of course, they did not arrive at the real truth, or they would not have procured my release."

"After that," I supplied, writing swiftly, "you became an expert psychical investigator and journeyed to America."

"Yes, to find the girl who had once laughed and studied with me. After some years I came to this town, simply to trace the legend of this Devil's Croft. And here, I found, she had lived and died, and left behind a daughter that was her image."

Judge Pursuivant cleared his throat. "I suspect that you're leaving out part of your adventures, Doctor."

Zoberg actually laughed. "Ja, I thought to spare you a few shocks. But if you will have them, you may. I visited Russia—and in 1922 a medical commission of the Soviet Union investigated several score mysterious cases of peasants killed—and eaten." He licked his lips, like a cat who thinks of meat. "In Paris I founded and conducted a rather interesting night school, for the study of diabolism in its relationship to science. And in 1936, certain summer vacationists on Long Island were almost frightened out of their wits by a lurking thing that seemed half beast, half man." He chuckled. "Your *Literary Digest* made much of it. The lurking thing was, of course, myself."

We stared. "Say, why do you do these things?" the constable blurted.

Zoberg turned to him, head quizzically askant. "Why do you uphold your local laws? Or why does Judge Pursuivant study ancient philosophies? Or why do Wills and Susan turn soft eyes upon each other? Because the heart of each so insists."

Susan was clutching my arm. Her fingers bit into my flesh as Zoberg's eyes sought her again.

"I found the daughter of someone I once loved," he went on, with real gentleness in his voice. "Wills, at least, can see in her what I saw. A new inspiration came to me, a wish and a plan to have a comrade in my secret exploits."

"A beast-thing like yourself?" prompted the judge.

Zoberg nodded. "A *lupa* to my *lupus*. But this girl—Susan Gird—had not inherited the psychic possibilities of her mother."

"What!" I shouted. "You yourself said

that she was the greatest medium of all time!"

"I did say so. But it was a lie."

"Why, in heaven's name——"

"It was my hope," he broke in quietly, "to make of her a medium, or a lycanthrope—call the phenomenon which you will. Are you interested in my proposed method?" He gazed mockingly around, and his eyes rested finally upon me. "Make full notes, Wills. This will be interesting, if not stupefying, to the psychic research committees."

"It is, as you know, a supernatural substance that is exuded to change the appearance of my body. What, I wondered, would some of that substance do if smeared upon her?"

I started to growl out a curse upon him, but Judge Pursuivant, rapt, motioned for me to keep silent.

"Think back through all the demonologies you have read," Zoberg was urging. "What of the strange 'witch ointments' that, spread over an ordinary human body, gave it beast-form and beast-heart? There, again, legend had basis in scientific fact."

"By the thunder, you're logical," muttered Judge Pursuivant.

"And damnable," I added. "Go on, Doctor. You were going to smear the change-stuff upon Susan."

"But first, I knew, I must convince her that she had within her the essence of a wolf. And so, the séances."

"She was no medium," I said again.

"I made her think she was. I hypnotized her, and myself did weird wonders in the dark room. But she, in a trance, did not know. I needed witnesses to convince her."

"So you invited Mr. Wills," supplied Judge Pursuivant.

"Yes, and her father. They had been prepared to accept her as medium and me

as observer. Seeing a beast-form, they would tell her afterward that it was she."

"Zoberg," I said between set teeth, "you're convicted out of your own mouth of rottenness that convinces me of the existence of the Devil after whom this grove was named. I wish to heaven that I'd killed you when we were fighting."

"Ach, Wills," he chuckled, "you'd have missed this most entertaining autobiographical lecture."

"He's right," grumbled O'Bryant; and, "Let him go on," the judge pleaded with me.

"ONCE sure of this power within her," Zoberg said deeply, "she would be prepared in heart and soul to change at touch of the ointment—the ectoplasm. Then, to me she must turn as a fellow-creature. Together, throughout the world, adventuring in a way unbelievable——"

His voice died, and we let it. He stood in the firelight, head thrown back, manacled hands folded. He might have been a martyr instead of a fiend for whom a death at the stake would be too easy.

"I can tell what spoiled the séance," I told him after a moment. "Gird, sitting opposite, saw that it was you, not Susan, who had changed. You had to kill him to keep him from telling, there and then."

"Yes," agreed Zoberg. "After that, you were arrested, and, later, threatened. I was in an awkward position. Susan must believe herself, not you, guilty. That is why I have championed you throughout. I went then to look for you."

"And attacked me," I added.

"The beast-self was ascendant. I cannot always control it completely." He sighed. "When Susan disappeared, I went to look for her on the second evening. When I came into this wood, the

change took place, half automatically. Associations, I suppose. Constable, your brother happened upon me in an evil hour."

"Yep," said O'Bryant gruffly.

"And that is the end," Zoberg said. "The end of the story and, I suppose, the end of me."

"You bet it is," the constable assured him. "You came with the judge to finish your rotten work. But we're finishing it for you."

"One moment," interjected Judge Pursuivant, and his fire-lit face betrayed a perplexed frown. "The story fails to explain one important thing."

"Does it so?" prompted Zoberg, inclining toward him with a show of negligent grace.

"If you were able to free yourself and kill Mr. Gird——"

"By heaven, that's right!" I broke in. "You were chained, Zoberg, to Susan and to your chair. I'd go bail for the strength and tightness of those handcuffs."

He grinned at each of us in turn and held out his hands with their manacles. "Is it not obvious?" he inquired.

We looked at him, a trifle blankly I suppose, for he chuckled once again.

"Another employment of the ectoplasm, that useful substance of change," he said gently. "At will my arms and legs assume thickness, and hold the rings of the confining irons wide. Then, when I wish, they grow slender again, and——"

He gave his hands a sudden flirt, and the bracelets fell from them on the instant. He pivoted and ran like a deer.

"Shoot!" cried the judge, and O'Bryant whipped the big gun from his holster.

Zoberg was almost within a vine-laced clump of bushes when O'Bryant fired. I heard a shrill scream, and saw Zoberg falter and drop to his hands and knees.

We were all starting forward. I paused a moment to put Susan behind me, and in that moment O'Bryant and Pursuivant sprang ahead and came up on either side of Zoberg. He was still alive, for he writhed up to a kneeling position and made a frantic clutch at the judge's coat. O'Bryant, so close that he barely raised his hand and arm, fired a second time.

Zoberg spun around somehow on his knees, stiffened and screamed. Perhaps I should say that he howled. In his voice was the inarticulate agony of a beast wounded to death. Then he collapsed.

Both men stooped above him, cautious but thorough in their examination. Finally Judge Pursuivant straightened up and faced toward us.

"Keep Miss Susan there with you," he warned me. "He's dead, and not a pretty sight."

Slowly they came back to us. Pursuivant was thoughtful, while O'Bryant, Zoberg's killer, seemed cheerful for the first time since I had met him. He even smiled at me, as Punch would smile after striking a particularly telling blow with his cudgel. Rubbing his pistol caressingly with his palm, he stowed it carefully away.

"I'm glad that's over," he admitted. "My brother can rest easy in his grave."

"And we have our work cut out for us," responded the judge. "We must decide just how much of the truth to tell when we make a report."

O'Bryant dipped his head in sage acquiescence. "You're right," he rumbled. "Yes, sir, you're right."

"Would you believe me," said the judge, "if I told you that I knew it was Zoberg, almost from the first?"

But Susan and I, facing each other, were beyond being surprized, even at that.

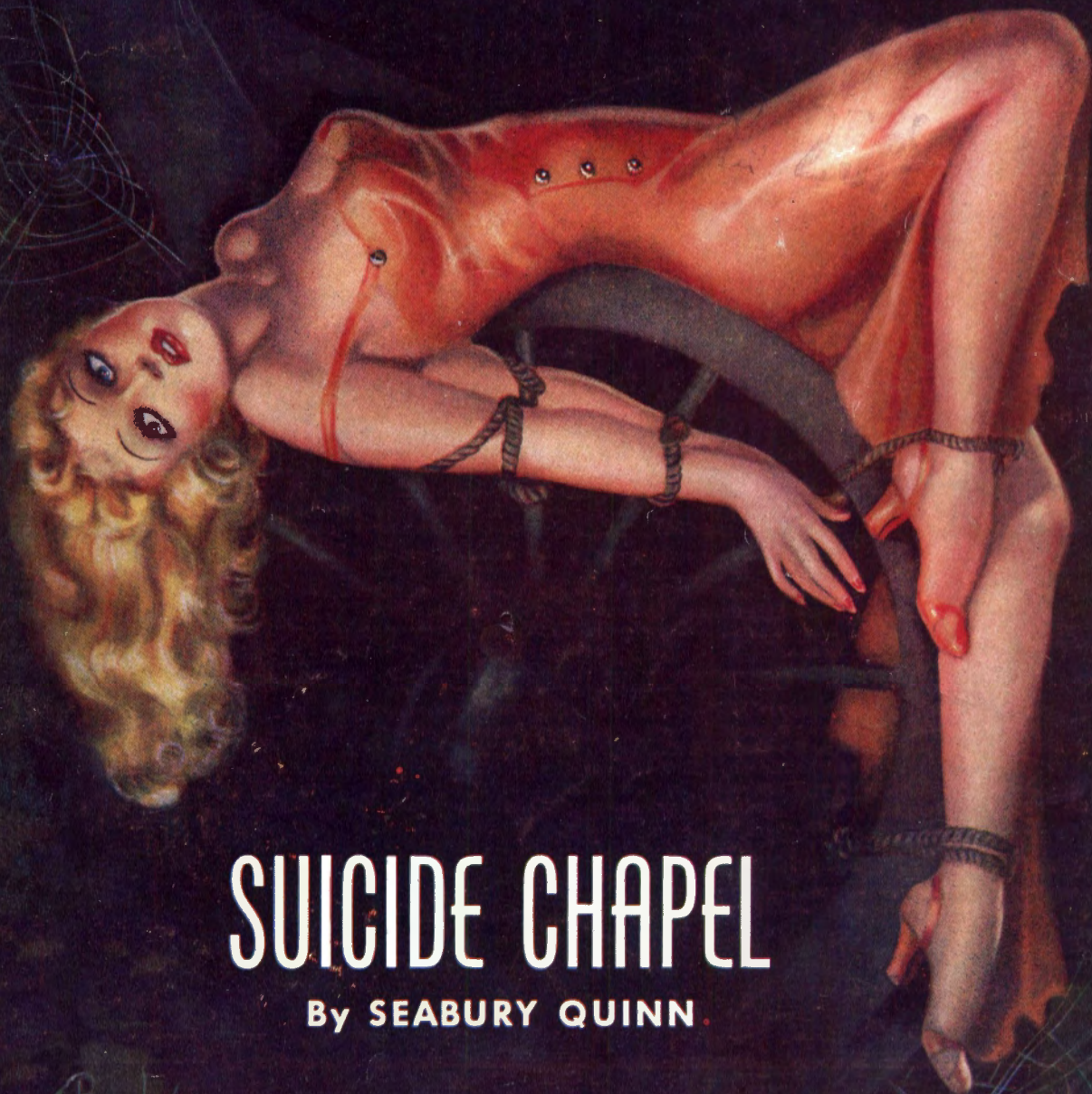
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16th Year of Publication

Weird Tales

JUNE

25c



SUICIDE CHAPEL

By SEABURY QUINN

ROBERT BLOCH

GANS T FIELD

EANDO BINDER

"Get out!" cried Varduk again. "By what power do you come for your victim now?"



The Black Drama

By GANS T. FIELD

'A strange weird story about the eery personality known as Varduk, who claimed descent from Lord Byron, and the hideous doom that stalked in his wake

Powers, passions, all I see in other beings,
Have been to me as rain unto the sands
Since that all-nameless hour.

—Lord Byron: *Manfred*.

Foreword

UNLIKE most actors, I do not consider my memoirs worth the attention of the public. Even if I did so consider them, I have no desire to

carry my innermost dear secrets to market. Often and often I have flung aside the autobiography of some famous man or woman, crying aloud: "Surely this is the very nonpareil of bad taste!"

Yet my descendants—and, after certain despairful years, again I have hope of descendants—will want to know something

about me. I write this record of utterly strange happenings while it is yet new and clear in my mind, and I shall seal it and leave it among my important possessions, to be found and dealt with at such time as I may die. It is not my wish that the paper be published or otherwise brought to the notice of any outside my immediate family and circle of close friends. Indeed, if I thought that such a thing would happen I might write less frankly.

Please believe me, you who will read; I know that part of the narrative will strain any credulity, yet I am ready with the now-threadbare retort of Lord Byron, of whose works more below: "Truth is stranger than fiction." I have, too, three witnesses who have agreed to vouch for the truth of what I have set down. Their only criticism is that I have spoken too kindly of them. If anything, I have not spoken kindly enough.

Like Peter Quince in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I have rid my prolog like a rough colt. Perhaps, like Duke Theseus, you my readers will be assured thereby of my sincerity.

Signed,

GILBERT CONNATT,
New York City
August 1, 1938

We, the undersigned, having read the appended statement of Gilbert Connatt, do hereby declare it to be true in substance.

Signed,

SIGRID HOLGAR
KEITH HILARY PURSIVANT
JACOB A. SWITZ

1. Drafted

THE counterman in the little hamburger stand below Times Square gazed at me searchingly.

"Haven't I seen you somewhere?" he

asked, and when I shook my head he made a gesture as of inspiration. "I got it, buddy. There was a guy in a movie like you—tall, thin—black mustache and eyes——"

"I'm not in pictures," I told him, quite truthfully as concerned the moment. "Make me a double hamburger."

"And coffee?"

"Yes." Then I remembered that I had but fifteen cents, and that double hamburgers cost a dime. I might want a second sandwich. "Make it a single instead."

"No, a double," piped somebody at my elbow, and a short, plump figure climbed upon the next stool. "Two doubles, for me and my friend here, and I'm paying. Gilbert Connatt, at half-past the eleventh hour I run onto you by the luck of the Switzes. I am glad to see you like an old father to see his wandering boy."

I had known that voice of old in Hollywood. Turning, I surveyed the fat, blob-nosed face, the crossed eyes behind shell-rimmed glasses, the thick, curly hair, the ingratiating smile. "Hello, Jake," I greeted him without enthusiasm.

Jake Switz waved at the counterman. "Two coffees with those hamburgers." His strange oblique gaze shifted back to me. "Gib, to me you are more welcome than wine at a wedding. In an uptown hotel who do you think is wondering about you with tears in her eyes as big as electric light bulbs?" He shrugged and extended his palms, as if pleased at being able to answer his own question. "Sigrid Holgar!"

I made no reply, but drew a frayed shirt-cuff back into the worn sleeve of my jacket. Jake Switz continued: "I've been wondering where to get hold of you, Gib. How would you like again to play leading man for Sigrid, huh?"

It is hard to look full into cross-eyes, but I managed it. "Go back to her," I

bade him, "and tell her I'm not taking charity from somebody who threw me down."

Jake caught my arm and shook it earnestly. "But that ain't true, Gib. It's only that she's been so successful she makes you look like a loser. Gib, you know as well as you know your own name that it was you that threw her down—so hard she ran like a silver dollar."

"I won't argue," I said, "and I won't have charity."

I meant that. It hurt to think of Sigrid and myself as we had been five years ago—she an inspired but unsure newcomer from Europe, I the biggest star on the biggest lot in the motion picture industry. We made a film together, another, became filmdom's favorite lovers on and off screen. Then the quarrel; Jake was wrong, it was Sigrid's fault. Or was it? Anyway, she was at the head of the class now, and I had been kicked away from the foot.

The counterman set our sandwiches before us. I took a hungry bite and listened to Jake's pleadings.

"It would be you doing her and me a favor, Gib. Listen this one time—please, to give Jake Switz a break." His voice quavered earnestly. "You know that Sigrid is going to do a stage play."

"I've read about it in *Variety*," I nodded. "Horror stuff, isn't it? Like *Dracula*, I suppose, with women fainting and nurses dragging them out of the theater."

"Nurses!" repeated Jake Switz scornfully. "Huh, doctors we'll need. At our show Jack Dempsey himself would faint dead away on the floor, it's so horrible!" He subsided and began to beg once more. "But you know how Sigrid is. Quiet and restrained—a genius. She wouldn't warm up, no matter what leading man we suggested. Varduk, the producer, mentioned you. 'Get Gilbert Connatt,' he said to me. 'She made a success with him once,

maybe she will again.' And right away Sigrid said yes."

I went on eating, then swallowed a mouthful of scalding coffee. Jake did the same, but without relish. Finally he exploded into a last desperate argument.

"Gib, for my life I can't see how you can afford to pass it up. Here you are, living on hamburgers——"

I whirled upon him so fiercely that the rest of the speech died on his open lips. Rising, I tossed my fifteen cents on the counter and started for the door. But Jake yelled in protest, caught my shoulder and fairly wrestled me back.

"No, no," he was wailing. "Varduk would cut my heart out and feed it to the sparrows if I found you and lost you again. Gib, I didn't mean bad manners. I don't know nothing about manners, Gib, but have I ever treated you wrong?"

I had to smile. "No, Jake. You're a creature of instincts, and the instincts are rather better than the reasonings of most people. I think you're intrinsically loyal." I thought of the years he had slaved for Sigrid, as press agent, business representative, confidential adviser, contract maker and breaker, and faithful hound generally. "I'm sorry myself, Jake, to lose my temper. Let's forget it."

HE INSISTED on buying me another double hamburger, and while I ate it with unblunted appetite he talked more about the play Sigrid was to present.

"Horror stuff is due for a comeback, Gib, and this will be the start. A lovely, Gib. High class. Only Sigrid could do it. Old-fashioned, I grant you, but not a grain of corny stuff in it. It was written by that English guy, Lord Barnum—no, Byron. That's it, Lord Byron."

"I thought," said I, "that there was some question about the real authorship."

"So the papers say, but they holler 'phony' at their own grandmothers. Var-

duk is pretty sure. He knows a thing or two, that Varduk. You know what he is going to do? He is getting a big expert to read the play and make a report." Jake, who was more press agent than any other one thing, licked his good-humored lips. "What a bust in the papers that will be!"

Varduk. . . . I had heard that name, that single name whereby a new, brilliant and mysteriously picturesque giant of the theatrical world was known. Nobody knew where he had come from. Yet, hadn't Belasco been a riddle? And Ziegfeld? Of course, they had never courted the shadows like Varduk, had never refused to see interviewers or admirers. I meditated that I probably would not like Varduk.

"Send me a pass when your show opens," I requested.

"But you'll be in it, Gib. Passes of your own you'll be putting out. Ha! Listen this once while I try to do you good in spite of yourself, my friend. You can't walk out after eating up the hamburgers I bought."

He had me there. I could not muster the price of that second sandwich, and somehow the shrewd little fellow had surmised as much. He chuckled in triumph as I shrugged in token of surrender.

"I knew you would, Gib. Now, here." He wrote on a card. "This is Varduk's hotel and room number. Be there at eight o'clock tonight, to read the play and talk terms. And here."

His second proffer was a wad of money.

"Get some clothes, Gib. With a new suit and tie you'll look like a million dollars come home to roost. No, no. Take the dough and don't worry. Ain't we friends? If you never pay me back, it will be plenty soon enough."

He beamed my thanks away. Leaving the hamburger stand, we went in opposite directions,

2. *Byron's Lost Play*

I DID not follow Jake's suggestion exactly. Instead of buying new garments throughout, I went to the pawnshop where I had of late raised money on the remnants of a once splendid wardrobe. Here I redeemed a blue suit that would become me best, and a pair of hand-made Oxfords. Across the street I bought a fresh shirt and necktie. These I donned in my coffin-sized room on the top floor of a cheap hotel. After washing, shaving and powdering, I did not look so bad; I might even have been recognized as the Gilbert Connatt who made history in the lavish film version of *Lavengro*, that classic of gipsydom in which a newcomer named Sigrid Holgar had also risen to fame. . . .

I like to be prompt, and it was eight o'clock on the stroke when I tapped at the door of Varduk's suite. There was a movement inside, and then a cheerful voice: "Who's there?"

"Gilbert Connatt," I replied.

The lock scraped and the door opened. I looked into the handsome, ruddy face of a heavy, towering man who was perhaps a year younger than I and in much better physical condition. His was the wide, good-humored mouth, the short, straight nose of the Norman Scot. His blond hair was beginning to grow thin and his blue eyes seemed anxious.

"Come in, Mr. Connatt," he invited me, holding out his broad hand. "My name's Davidson — Elmo Davidson." And, as I entered, "This is Mr. Varduk." He might have been calling my attention to a prince royal.

I had come into a parlor, somberly decorated and softly lighted. Opposite me, in a shadowed portion, gazed a pallid face. It seemed to hang, like a mask, upon the dark tapestry that draped the wall. I was aware first of a certain light-

giving quality within or upon that face, as though it were bathed in phosphorescent oil. It would have been visible, plain even, in a room utterly dark. For the rest there were huge, deep eyes of a color hard to make sure of, a nose somewhat thick but finely shaped, a mouth that might have been soft once but now drew tight as if against pain, and a strong chin with a dimple.

"How do you do, Mr. Connatt," said a soft, low voice, and the mask inclined politely. A moment later elbows came forward upon a desk, and I saw the rest of the man Varduk start out of his protective shadows. His dark, double-breasted jacket and the black scarf at his throat had blended into the gloom of the tapestry. So had his chestnut-brown curls. As I came toward him, Varduk rose—he was of middle height, but looked taller by reason of his slimness—and offered me a slender white hand that gripped like a smith's tongs.

"I am glad that you are joining us," he announced cordially, in the tone of a host welcoming a guest to dinner. "Miss Holgar needs old friends about her, for her new stage adventure is an important item in her splendid career. And this," he dropped his hand to a sheaf of papers on the desk, "is a most important play."

Another knock sounded at the door, and Elmo Davidson admitted a young woman, short and steady-eyed. She was Martha Vining, the character actress, who was also being considered for a rôle in the play.

"Only Miss Holgar to come," Davidson said to me, with a smile that seemed to ask for friendship. "We've only a small cast, you know; five."

"I am expecting one more after Miss Holgar," amended Varduk, and Davidson made haste to add: "That's right, an expert antiquary—Judge Keith Pursuivant. He's going to look at our manu-

script and say definitely if it is genuine."

Not until then did Varduk invite me to sit down, waving me to a comfortable chair at one end of his desk. I groped in my pockets for a cigarette, but he pressed upon me a very long and very good cigar.

"I admire tobacco in its naked beauty," he observed with the wraith of a smile, and himself struck a match for me. Again I admired the whiteness of his hand, its pointed fingers and strong sensitivity of outline. Such hands generally betoken nervousness, but Varduk was serene. Even the fall of his fringed lids over those plumbless eyes seemed a deliberate motion, not an unthought wink.

Yet again a knock at the door, a brief colloquy and an ushering in by Elmo Davidson. This time it was Sigrid.

I got to my feet, as unsteady as a half-grown boy at his first school dance. Desperately I prayed not to look so moved as I felt. As for Sigrid, she paused and met my gaze frankly, with perhaps a shade's lightening of her gently tanned cheeks. She was a trifle thinner than when I had last seen her five years ago, and wore, as usual, a belted brown coat like an army officer's. Her hair, the blondest unbleached hair I have ever known, fell to her shoulders and curled at its ends like a full-bottomed wig in the portrait of some old cavalier. There was a green flash in it, as in a field of ripened grain. Framed in its two glistening cascades, her face was as I had known it, tapering from brow to chin over valiant cheekbones and set with eyes as large as Varduk's and bluer than Davidson's. She wore no make-up save a touch of rouge upon her short mouth—cleft above and full below, like a red heart. Even with low-heeled shoes, she was only two inches shorter than I.

"Am I late?" she asked Varduk, in that deep, shy voice of hers.

"Not a bit," he assured her. Then he

saw my awkward expectation and added, with monumental tact for which I blessed him fervently, "I think you know Mr. Gilbert Connatt."

Again she turned to me. "Of course," she replied. "Of course I know him. How do you do, Gib?"

I TOOK the hand she extended and, greatly daring, bent to kiss it. Her fingers fluttered against mine, but did not draw away. I drew her forward and seated her in my chair, then found a backless settee beside her. She smiled at me once, sidewise, and took from my package the cigarette I had forsaken for Varduk's cigar.

A hearty clap on my shoulder and a cry of greeting told me for the first time that little Jake Switz had entered with her.

Varduk's brief but penetrating glance subdued the exuberant Jake. We turned toward the desk and waited.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began Varduk, seriously but not heavily, "a new-found piece of Lord Byron's work is bound to be a literary sensation. We hope also to make a theatrical sensation, for our new-found piece is a play.

"A study of Lord Byron evokes varied impressions and appeals. Carlyle thought him a mere dandy, lacking Mr. Brummel's finesse and good humor, while Goethe insisted that he stood second only to Shakespeare among England's poets. His mistress, the Countess Guiccioli, held him literally to be an angel; on the other hand, both Lamartine and Southey called him Satan's incarnation. Even on minor matters—his skill at boxing and swimming, his depth of scholarship, his sincerity in early amours and final espousal of the Greek rebels—the great authorities differ. The only point of agreement is that he had color and individuality."

W. T.—4

He paused and picked up some of the papers from his desk.

"We have here his lost play, *Ruthven*. Students know that Doctor John Polidori wrote a lurid novel of horror called *The Vampire*, and that he got his idea, or inspiration, or both, from Byron. Polidori's tale in turn inspired the plays of Nodier and Dumas in French, and of Planché and Boucicault in English. Gilbert and Sullivan joked with the story in *Ruddigore*, and Bram Stoker read it carefully before attempting *Dracula*. This manuscript," again he lifted it, "is Byron's original. It is, as I have said, a drama."

His expressive eyes, bending upon the page in the dimness, seemed to shed a light of their own. "I think that neither Mr. Connatt nor Miss Vining has seen the play. Will you permit me to read?" He took our consent for granted, and began: "Scene, Malvina's garden. Time, late afternoon—Aubrey, sitting at Malvina's feet, tells his adventures."

Since *Ruthven* is yet unpublished, I take the liberty of outlining it as I then heard it for the first time. Varduk's voice was expressive, and his sense of drama good. We listened, intrigued and then fascinated, to the opening dialog in which young Aubrey tells his sweetheart of his recent adventures in wildest Greece. The blank verse struck me, at least, as being impressive and not too stiff, though better judges than I have called Byron unsure in that medium. Varduk changed voice and character for each rôle, with a skill almost ventriloquial, to create for us the illusion of an actual drama. I found quite moving Aubrey's story of how bandits were beaten off single-handed by his chance acquaintance, Lord Ruthven. At the point where Aubrey expresses the belief that Ruthven could not have survived the battle:

"I fled, but he remained; how could one man,
Even one so godly gallant, face so many?
He followed not. I knew that he was slain——"

At that point, I say, the first surprise comes with the servant's announcement that Ruthven himself has followed his traveling companion from Greece and waits, whole and sound, for permission to present himself.

No stage directions or other visualization; but immediate dialog defines the title rôle as courtly and sinister, fascinating and forbidding. Left alone with the maid-servant, Bridget, he makes unashamed and highly successful advances. When he lifts the cap from her head and lets her hair fall down, it reminds one that Byron himself had thus ordered it among the maids on his own estate. Byron had made love to them, too; perhaps some of Ruthven's speeches in this passage, at least, came wholemeal from those youthful conquests.

Yet the seduction is not a gay one, and smacks of bird and snake. When Ruthven says to Bridget,

"You move and live but at my will; dost hear?"
and she answers dully:

"I hear and do submit,"

awareness rises of a darkling and menacing power. Again, as Aubrey mentions the fight with the bandits, Ruthven dismisses the subject with the careless,

"I faced them, and who seeks my face seeks death,"

one feels that he fears and spares an enemy no more than a fly. And, suddenly, he turned his attentions to Malvina:

"Yes, I am evil, and my wickedness
Draws to your glister and your purity.
Now shall you light no darkness but mine own,
An orient pearl swathed in a midnight pall——"

Oscar, husband of the betrayed Bridget, rushes in at this point to denounce Ruthven and draw away his bemused mistress. At a touch from the visitor's finger, Oscar falls dead. Aubrey, arming himself with a club of whitethorn—a sovereign weapon against demons—strikes Ruthven down.

Dying, the enchanter persuades Aubrey and Malvina to drag him into the open and so leave him. As the moon rises upon his body, he moves and stands up:

"Luna, my mother, fountain of my life,
Once more thy rays restore me with their kiss.
Grave, I reject thy shelter! Death, stand back! . . .

"Curtain," said Varduk suddenly, and smiled around at us.

"So ends our first act," he continued in his natural voice. "No date—nor yet are we obliged to date it. For purposes of our dramatic production, however, I intend to lay it early in the past century, in the time of Lord Byron himself. Act Two," and he picked up another section of the manuscript, "begins a century later. We shall set it in modern times. No blank verse now—Byron cleverly identifies his two epochs by offering his later dialog in natural prose. That was the newest of new tricks in his day."

Again he read to us. The setting was the same garden, with Mary Aubrey and her cousin Swithin, descendants of the Aubrey and Malvina of the first act, alternating between light words of love and attentions to the aged crone Bridget. This survivor of a century and more croaks out the fearsome tale of Ruthven's visit and what followed. Her grandson Oscar, Mary's brother, announces a caller.

The newcomer explains that he has inherited the estate of Ruthven, ancient foe of the Aubreys, and that he wishes to make peace. But Bridget, left alone with him, recognizes in him her old tempter, surviving ageless and pitiless. Oscar, too, hears the secret, and is told that this is his grandfather. Bit by bit, the significance of a dead man restless after a century grows in the play and upon the servants. They swear slavishly to help him. He seeks a double and sinister goal. Swithin, image of his great-grandfather Aubrey, must die for that ancestor's former triumph over Ruthven. Mary, the

later incarnation of Malvina, excites Ruthven's passion as did her ancestress.

Then the climax. Malvina, trapped by Ruthven, defies him, then offers herself as payment for Swithin's life. Swithin, refusing the sacrifice, thrusts Ruthven through with a sword, but to no avail. Oscar overpowers him, and the demoniac lord pronounces the beginning of a terrible curse; but Mary steps forward as if to accept her lover's punishment. Ruthven revokes his words, blesses her. As the Almighty's name issues from his lips, he falls dead and decaying.

"End of the play," said Varduk. "I daresay you have surmised what rôles I plan for you. Miss Holgar and Mr. Connatt are my choices for Malvina and Aubrey in the first act, and Mary and Swithin in the second. Miss Vining will create the rôle of Bridget, and Davidson will undertake the two Oscars."

"And Ruthven?" I prompted, feeling unaccountably presumptuous in speaking uninvited.

Varduk smiled and lowered his fringed lids. "The part is not too difficult," he murmured. "Ruthven is off stage more than on, an influence rather than a flesh-and-blood character. I shall honor myself with this title rôle."

Switz, sitting near me, produced a watch. We had been listening to the play for full two hours and a half.

Again a knock sounded at the door. Davidson started to rise, but Varduk's slender hand waved him down.

"That will be Judge Pursuivant. I shall admit him myself. Keep your seats all."

He got up and crossed the floor, walking stiffly as though he wore tight boots. I observed with interest that in profile his nose seemed finer and sharper, and that his ears had no lobes.

"Come in, Judge Pursuivant," he said cordially at the door. "Come in, sir."

3. Enter Judge Pursuivant

KEITH HILARY PURSUIVANT, the occultist and antiquary, was as arresting as Varduk himself, though never were two men more different in appearance and manner. Our first impression was of a huge tweed-clad body, a pink face with a heavy tawny mustache, twinkling pale eyes and a shock of golden-brown hair. Under one arm he half crushed a wide black hat, while the other hand trailed a heavy stick of mottled Malacca, banded with silver. There was about him the same atmosphere of mature sturdiness as invests Edward Arnold and Victor McLaglen, and withal a friendly gayety. Without being elegant or dashing, he caught and held the regard. Men like someone like that, and so, I believe, do women who respect something beyond sleek hair and brash repartee.

Varduk introduced him all around. The judge bowed to Sigrid, smiled at Miss Vining, and shook hands with the rest of us. Then he took a seat at the desk beside Varduk.

"Pardon my trembling over a chance to see something that may have been written by Lord Byron to lie perdu for generations," he said pleasantly. "He and his works have long been enthusiasms of mine. I have just published a modest note on certain aspects of his——"

"Yes, I know," nodded Varduk, who was the only man I ever knew who could interrupt without seeming rude. "*A Defense of the Wickedest Poet*—understanding and sympathetic, and well worth the praise and popularity it is earning. May I also congratulate you on your two volumes of demonology, *Vampyricon* and *The Unknown that Terrifies*?"

"Thank you," responded Pursuivant, with a bow of his shaggy head. "And now, the manuscript of the play——"

"Is here." Varduk pushed it across the desk toward the expert.

Pursuivant bent for a close study. After a moment he drew a floor lamp close to cast a bright light, and donned a pair of pince-nez.

"The words 'by Lord Byron', set down here under the title, are either genuine or a very good forgery," he said at once. "I call your attention, Mr. Varduk, to the open capital B, the unlooped down-stroke of the Y, and the careless scrambling of the O and N." He fumbled in an inside pocket and produced a handful of folded slips. "These are enlarged photostats of several notes by Lord Byron. With your permission, Mr. Varduk, I shall use them for comparison."

He did so, holding the cards to the manuscript, moving them here and there as if to match words. Then he held a sheet of the play close to the light. "Again I must say," he announced at last, "that this is either the true handwriting of Byron or else a very remarkable forgery. Yet——"

Varduk had opened a drawer of the desk and once more he interrupted. "Here is a magnifying glass, Judge Pursuivant. Small, but quite powerful." He handed it over. "Perhaps, with its help, you can decide with more accuracy."

"Thank you." Pursuivant bent for a closer and more painstaking scrutiny. For minutes he turned over page after page, squinting through the glass Varduk had lent him. Finally he looked up again.

"No forgery here. Every stroke of the pen is a clean one. A forger draws pictures, so to speak, of the handwriting he copies, and with a lens like this one can plainly see the jagged, deliberate sketch-work." He handed back the magnifying glass and doffed his spectacles, then let his thoughtful eyes travel from one of us to the others. "I'll stake my legal and

scholastic reputation that Byron himself wrote these pages."

"Your stakes are entirely safe, sir," Varduk assured him with a smile. "Now that you have agreed—and I trust that you will allow us to inform the newspapers of your opinion—that *Ruthven* is Byron's work, I am prepared to tell how the play came into my possession. I was bequeathed it—by the author himself."

We all looked up at that, highly interested. Varduk smiled upon us as if pleased with the sensation he had created.

"The germ of *Ruthven* came into being one night at the home of the poet Shelley, on the shores of Lake Geneva. The company was being kept indoors by rain and wind, and had occupied itself with reading German ghost stories, and then tried their own skill at Gothic tales. One of those impromptu stories we know—Mary Godwin's masterpiece, *Frankenstein*. Lord Byron told the strange adventures of Ruthven, and Polidori appropriated them—that we also know; but later that night, alone in his room, Byron wrote the play we have here."

"In one sitting?" asked Martha Vining.

"In one sitting," replied Varduk. "He was a swift and brilliant worker. In his sixteen years of active creative writing, he produced nearly eighty thousand lines of published verse—John Drinkwater reckons an average of fourteen lines, or the equivalent of a complete sonnet, for every day. This prodigious volume of poetry he completed between times of making love, fighting scandal, traveling, quarreling, philosophizing, organizing the Greek revolution. An impressive record of work, both in size and in its proportion of excellence."

Sigrid leaned forward. "But you said that Lord Byron himself bequeathed the play to you."

Again Varduk's tight, brief smile. "It sounds fantastic, but it happened. Byron

gave the manuscript to Claire Clairmont, his mistress and the mother of two of his children. He wanted it kept a secret—he had been called fiend incarnate too often. So he charged her that she and the children after her keep the play in trust, to be given the world a hundred years from the date of his death."

PURSUIVANT cleared his throat. "I was under the impression that Byron had only one child by Claire Clairmont, Mr. Varduk. Allegra, who died so tragically at the age of six."

"He had two," was Varduk's decisive reply. "A son survived, and had issue."

"Wasn't Claire's son by Shelley?" asked Pursuivant.

Varduk shook his curly head. "No, by Lord Byron." He paused and drew a gentle breath, as if to give emphasis to what he was going to add. Then: "I am descended from that son, ladies and gentlemen. I am the great-grandson of Lord Byron."

He sank back into his shadows once more and let his luminous face seem again like a disembodied mask against the dark tapestry. He let us be dazzled by his announcement for some seconds. Then he spoke again.

"However, to return to our play. Summer is at hand, and the opening will take place at the Lake Jozgid Theater, in July, later to come to town with the autumn. All agreed? Ready to discuss contracts?" He looked around the circle, picking up our affirmative nods with his intensely understanding eyes. "Very good. Call again tomorrow. Mr. Davidson, my assistant, will have the documents and all further information."

Jake Switz was first to leave, hurrying to telephone announcements to all the morning newspapers. Sigrid, rising, smiled at me with real warmth.

"So nice to see you again, Gib. Do not

bother to leave with me—my suite is here in this hotel."

She bade Varduk good-night, nodded to the others and left quickly. I watched her departure with what must have been very apparent and foolish ruefulness on my face. It was the voice of Judge Pursuivant that recalled me to my surroundings.

"I've seen and admired your motion pictures, Mr. Connatt," he said graciously. "Shall we go out together? Perhaps I can persuade you to join me in another of my enthusiasms—late food and drink."

We made our adieux and departed. In the bar of the hotel we found a quiet table, where my companion scanned the liquor list narrowly and ordered samples of three Scotch whiskies. The waiter brought them. The judge sniffed each experimentally, and finally made his choice.

"Two of those, and soda—no ice," he directed. "Something to eat, Mr. Connatt? No? Waiter, bring me some of the cold tongue with potato salad." Smiling, he turned back to me. "Good living is my greatest pursuit."

"Greater than scholarship?"

He nodded readily. "However, I don't mean that tonight's visit with Mr. Varduk was not something to rouse any man's interest. It was full of good meat for any antiquary's appetite. By the way, were you surprized when he said that he was descended from Lord Byron?"

"Now that you mention it, I wasn't," I replied. "He's the most Byronic individual I have ever met."

"Right. Of course, the physical resemblances might be accidental, the manner a pose. But in any case, he's highly picturesque, and from what little I can learn about him, he's eminently capable as well. You feel lucky in being with him in this venture?"

I felt like confiding in this friendly,

tawny man. "Judge Pursuivant," I said honestly, "any job is a godsend to me just now."

"Then let me congratulate you, and warn you."

"Warn me?"

"Here's your whisky," he said suddenly, and was silent while he himself mixed the spirit with the soda. Handing me a glass, he lifted the other in a silent toasting gesture. We drank, and then I repeated, "Warn me, you were saying, sir?"

"Yes." He tightened his wide, intelligent mouth under the feline mustache. "It's this play, *Ruthven*."

"What about it?"

His plate of tongue and salad was set before him at this juncture. He lifted a morsel on his fork and tasted it.

"This is very good, Mr. Connatt. You should have tried some. Where were we? Oh, yes, about *Ruthven*. I was quite unreserved in my opinion, wasn't I?"

"So it seemed when you offered to stake your reputation on the manuscript being genuine."

"So I did," he agreed, cutting a slice of tongue into mouthfuls. "And I meant just that. What I saw of the play was Byronic in content, albeit creepy enough to touch even an occultist with a shiver. The handwriting, too, was undoubtedly Byron's. Yet I felt like staking my reputation on something else."

He paused and we each had a sip of whisky. His recourse to the liquor seemed to give him words for what he wished to say.

"It's a paradox, Mr. Connatt, and I am by no means so fond of paradoxes as was my friend, the late Gilbert Chesterton; but, while Byron most certainly wrote *Ruthven*, he wrote it on paper that was watermarked less than ten years ago."

4. Into the Country

THE judge would not enlarge upon his perplexing statement, but he would and did play the most genial host I had ever known since the extravagant days of Hollywood. We had a number of drinks, and he complimented me on my steadiness of hand and head. When we parted I slept well in my little room that already seemed more cheerful.

Before noon the following day I returned to Varduk's hotel. Only Davidson was there, and he was far more crisp and to the point than he had been when his chief was present. I accepted the salary figure already set down on my contract form, signed my name, received a copy of the play and left.

After my frugal lunch—I was still living on the money Jake Switz had lent me—I walked to the library and searched out a copy of *Contemporary Americans*. Varduk's name I did not find, and wondered at that until the thought occurred that he, a descendant of Byron, was undoubtedly a British subject. Before giving up the volume I turned to the P's. This time my search bore fruit:

PURSUIVANT, Keith Hilary; b. 1891, Richmond, Va., only son of Hilary Pursuivant (b. 1840, Pursuivant Landing, Ky.; Col. and Maj.-Gen., Va. Volunteer Infantry, 1861-65; attorney and journalist; d. 1898) and Anne Elizabeth (Keith) Pursuivant (b. 1864, Edinburgh; d. 1891).

Educ. Richmond pub. sch., Lawrenceville and Yale. A. B., male, 1908. Phi Beta Kappa, Skulls and Bones, football, forensics. LL. B., Columbia, 1911. Ph. D., Oxford, 1922. Admitted to Virginia bar, 1912. Elected 1914, Judge district court, Richmond. Resigned, 1917, to enter army. Major, Intelligence Div., U. S. A., 1917-19. D. S. C., Cong. Medal of Honor, *Legion d'Honneur* (Fr.). Ret. legal practice, 1919.

Author: *The Unknown That Terrifies, Cannibalism in America, Vampiricon, An Indictment of Logic*, etc.

Clubs: Lambs, Inkhorn, Gastronemics, Saber.

Hobbies: Food, antiquaries, demonology, fencing.

Protestant. Independent. Unmarried.

Address: Low Haven, RFD No. 1, Bucklin, W. Va.

Thus the clean-picked skeleton of a life history; yet it was no hard task to restore

some of its tissues, even coax it to life. Son of a Southern aristocrat who was a soldier while young and a lawyer and writer when mature, orphaned of his Scotch mother in the first year of his existence—had she died in giving him life?—Keith Pursuivant was born, it seemed, to distinction. To graduate from Yale in 1908 he must have been one of the youngest men in his class, if not the youngest; yet, at seventeen, he was an honor student, an athlete, member of an exclusive senior society and an orator. After that, law school, practise and election to the bench of his native community at the unheard-of age of twenty-three.

Then the World War, that sunderer of career-chains and remolder of men. The elder Pursuivant had been a colonel at twenty-one, a major-general before twenty-five; Keith, his son, deserting his brilliant legal career, was a major at twenty-six, but in the corps of brain-soldiers that matched wits with an empire. That he came off well in the contest was witnessed by his decorations, earnest of valor and resource.

"Ret. legal practise, 1919." So he did not remain in his early profession, even though it promised so well. What then? Turn back for the answer. "Ph. D., Oxford, 1922." His new love was scholarship. He became an author and philosopher. His interests included the trencher—I had seen him eat and drink with hearty pleasure—the study hall, the steel blade.

What else? "Protestant"—religion was his, but not narrowly so, or he would have been specific about a single sect. "Independent"—his political adventures had not bound him to any party. "Unmarried"—he had lived too busily for love? Or had he known it, and lost? I, too, was unmarried, and I was well past thirty. "Address: Low Haven"—a country home, apparently pretentious enough to

bear a name like a manor house. Probably comfortable, withdrawn, full of sturdy furniture and good books, with a well-stocked pantry and cellar.

I felt that I had learned something about the man, and I was desirous of learning more.

ON THE evening mail I received an envelope addressed in Jake Switz's jagged handwriting. Inside were half a dozen five-dollar bills and a railway ticket, on the back of which was scribbled in pencil: "Take the 9 a. m. train at Grand Central. I'll meet you at the Dillard Falls Junction with a car. J. Switz."

I blessed the friendly heart of Sigrid's little serf, and went home to pack. The room clerk seemed surprized and relieved when I checked out in the morning, paying him in full. I reached the station early and got on the train, securing a good seat in the smoking-car. Many were boarding the car, but none looked at me, not even the big fellow who seated himself into position at my side. Six years before I had been mobbed as I stepped off the Twentieth Century Limited in this very station—a hundred women had rent away my coat and shirt in rags for souvenirs—

"Would you let me have a match, Mr. Connatt?" asked a voice I had heard before. My companion's pale blue eyes were turned upon me, and he was tucking a trusty-looking pipe beneath his blond mustache.

"Judge Pursuivant!" I cried, with a pleasure I did not try to disguise. "You here—it's like one of those Grand Hotel plays."

"Not so much coincidence as that," he smiled, taking the match I had found. "You see, I am still intrigued by the paradox we discussed the other night; I mean, the riddle of how and when *Ruthven* was set down. It so happens that an old

friend of mine has a cabin near the Lake Jozgid Theater, and I need a vacation." He drew a cloud of comforting smoke. "Judiciously I accepted his invitation to stay there. You and I shall be neighbors."

"Good ones, I hope," was my warm rejoinder, as I lighted a cigarette from the match he still held.

By the time our train clanked out of the subterranean caverns of Grand Central Station, we were deep in pleasant talk. At my earnest plea, the judge discussed Lord Byron.

"A point in favor of the genuineness of the document," he began, "is that Byron was exactly the sort of man who would conceive and write a play like *Ruthven*."

"With the semi-vampire plot?" I asked. "I always thought that England of his time had just about forgotten about vampires."

"Yes, but Byron fetched them back into the national mind. Remember, he traveled in Greece as a young man, and the belief was strong in that part of the world. In a footnote to *The Giaour*—you'll find his footnotes in any standard edition of his works—he discusses vampires."

"Varduk spoke of those who fancied Byron to be the devil," I remembered.

"They may have had more than fancy to father the thought. Not that I do not admire Byron, for his talents and his achievements; but something of a diabolic curse hangs over him. Why," and Pursuivant warmed instantly to the discussion, "his very family history reads like a Gothic novel. His father was 'Mad Jack' Byron, the most sinful man of his generation; his grandfather was Admiral 'Foul-weather Jack' Byron, about whose ill luck at sea is more than a suggestion of divine displeasure. The title descended to Byron from his great-uncle, the 'Wicked Lord,' who was a murderer, a libertine, a

believer in evil spirits, and perhaps a practising diabolist. The family seat, Newstead Abbey, had been the retreat of medieval monks, and when those monks were driven from it they may have cursed their dispossessors. In any case, it had ghosts and a 'Devil's Wood.' "

"Byron was just the man for that heritage," I observed.

"He certainly was. As a child he carried pistols in his pockets and longed to kill someone. As a youth he chained a bear and a wolf at his door, drank wine from a human skull, and mocked religion by wearing a monk's habit to orgies. His unearthly beauty, his mocking tongue, fitted in with his wickedness and his limp to make him seem an incarnation of the hoofed Satan. As for his sins——" The judge broke off in contemplation of them.

"Nobody knows them all," I reminded.

"Perhaps he repented," mused my companion. "At least he seems to have forgotten his light loves and dark pleasures, turned to good works and the effort to liberate the Greeks from their Turkish oppressors. If he began life like an imp, he finished like a hero. I hope that he was sincere in that change, and not too late."

I expressed the desire to study Byron's life and writings, and Pursuivant opened his suitcase on the spot to lend me Drinkwater's and Maurois' biographies, a copy of the collected poems, and his own work, *A Defense of the Wickedest Poet*.

We ate lunch together in the dining-car, Pursuivant pondering his choice from the menu as once he must have pondered his decision in a case at court. When he made his selection, he devoured it with the same gusto I had observed before. "Food may be a necessity," quoth he between bites, "but the enjoyment of it is a blessing."

"You have other enjoyments," I reminded him. "Study, fencing——"

That brought on a discussion of the sword as weapon and symbol. My own swordsmanship is no better or worse than that of most actors, and Pursuivant was frank in condemning most stage fencers.

"I dislike to see a clumsy lout posturing through the duel scenes of *Cyrano de Bergerac* or *Hamlet*," he growled. "No offense, Mr. Connatt. I confess that you, in your motion-picture interpretation of the rôle of Don Cæsar de Bazan, achieved some very convincing cut-and-thrust. From what I saw, you have an understanding of the sport. Perhaps you and I can have a bout or so between your rehearsals."

I said that I would be honored, and then we had to collect our luggage and change trains. An hour or more passed on the new road before we reached our junction.

JAKE SWITZ was there as he had promised to be, at the wheel of a sturdy repainted car. He greeted us with a triumphant story of his astuteness in helping Elmo Davidson to bargain for the vehicle, broke off to invite Pursuivant to ride with us to his cabin, and then launched into a hymn of praise for Sigrid's early rehearsals of her rôle.

"Nobody in America seems to think she ever made anything but movies," he pointed out. "At home in Sweden, though, she did deep stuff—Ibsen and them guys—and her only a kid then. You wait, Gib, she'll knock from the theater public their eyes out with her class."

The road from the junction was deep-set between hills, and darkly hedged with high trees. "This makes the theater hard to get at," Jake pointed out as he drove. "People will have to make a regular pilgrimage to see Holgar play in *Ruthven*, and they'll like it twice as well because of all the trouble they took."

Pursuivant left us at the head of a lit-

tle path, with a small structure of logs showing through the trees beyond. We waved good-bye to him, and Jake trod on his starter once more. As we rolled away, he glanced sidewise at me. His crossed eyes behind their thick lenses had grown suddenly serious.

"Only one night Sigrid and I been here, Gib," he said, somewhat darkly, "and I don't like it."

"Don't tell me you're haunted," I rallied him, laughing. "That's good press-agentry for a horror play, but I'm one of the actors. I won't be buying tickets."

He did not laugh in return.

"I won't say haunted, Gib. That means ordinary ghosts, and whatever is here at the theater is worse than ghosts. Listen what happened."

5. *Jake's Story*

SIGRID, with Jake in attendance as usual, had left New York on the morning after Varduk's reading of *Ruthven*. They had driven in the car Jake had helped Davidson to buy, and thus they avoided the usual throngs of Sigrid's souvenir-demanding public, which would have complicated their departure by train. At Dillard Falls Junction, Varduk himself awaited them, having come up on a night train. Jake took time to mail me a ticket and money, then they drove the long, shadowy way to the theater.

Lake Jozgid, as most rural New Yorkers know, is set rather low among wooded hills and bluffs. The unevenness of the country and the poverty of the soil have discouraged cultivation, so that farms and villages are few. As the party drove, Varduk suggested an advantage in this remoteness, which suggestion Jake later passed on to Judge Pursuivant and me; where a less brilliant or more accessible star might be ignored in such far quarters, Sigrid would find Lake Jozgid to her advantage. The world would beat a path to

her box office, and treasure a glimpse of her the more because that glimpse had been difficult of attainment.

The theater building itself had been a great two-story lodge, made of heavy logs and hand-hewn planks. Some sporting-club, now defunct, had owned it, then abandoned it when fish grew scarce in the lake. Varduk had leased it cheaply, knocked out all partitions on the ground floor, and set up a stage, a lobby and pew-like benches. The upper rooms would serve as lodgings for himself and his associate Davidson, while small out-buildings had been fitted up to accommodate the rest of us.

Around this group of structures clung a thick mass of timber. Sigrid, who had spent her girlhood among Sweden's forests, pointed out that it was mostly virgin and inquired why a lumber company had never cut logs here. Varduk replied that the property had been private for many years, then changed the subject by the welcome suggestion that they have dinner. They had brought a supply of provisions, and Jake, who is something of a cook in addition to his many other professions, prepared a meal. Both Sigrid and Jake ate heartily, but Varduk seemed only to take occasional morsels for politeness' sake.

In the evening, a full moon began to rise across the lake. Sitting together in Varduk's upstairs parlor, the three saw the great soaring disk of pale light, and Sigrid cried out joyfully that she wanted to go out and see better.

"Take a lantern if you go out at night," counseled Varduk over his cigar.

"A lantern?" Sigrid repeated. "But that would spoil the effect of the moonlight."

Her new director blew a smooth ring of smoke and stared into its center, as though a message lay there. Then he turned his brilliant eyes to her. "If you

are wise, you will do as I say," he made answer.

Men like Varduk are masterful and used to being obeyed. Sometimes they lose sight of the fact that women like Sigrid are not used to being given arbitrary commands without explanation. She fell silent and a little frigid for half an hour—often I had seen her just as Jake was describing her. Then she rose and excused herself, saying that she was tired from the morning's long drive and would go to bed early. Varduk rose and courteously bowed her to the stairs. Since her sleeping-quarters, a cleverly rebuilt woodshed, were hardly a dozen steps from the rear of the lodge building itself, neither man thought it necessary to accompany her.

Left alone, Varduk and Jake carried on an idle conversation, mostly about publicity plans. Jake, who in the show business had done successfully almost everything but acting, found in his companion a rather penetrating and accurate commentator on this particular aspect of production. Indeed, Varduk debated him into a new attitude—one of restraint and dignity instead of novel and insistent extravagance.

"You're right," Jake announced at length. "I'm going to get the releases that go out in tomorrow's mail. I'll cut out every 'stupendous' and 'colossal' I wrote into them. Good night, Mr. Varduk."

He, too, trotted downstairs and left the main building for his own sleeping-room, which was the loft of an old boat-house. As he turned toward the water, he saw a figure walking slowly and dreamily along its edge—Sigrid, her hands tucked into the pockets of the light belted coat she had donned against possible night chills, her head flung back as though she sought all of the moonlight upon her rapt face.

Although she had wandered out to the

brink of the sandy beach and so stood in the open brightness, clumps of bushes and young trees grew out almost to the lake. One tufty belt of scrub willow extended from the denser timber to a point within a dozen feet of Sigrid. It made a screen of gloom between Jake's viewpoint and the moon's spray of silver. Yet, he could see, light was apparently soaking through its close-set leaves, a streak of soft radiance that was so filtered as to look murky, greenish, like the glow from rotting salmon.

EVEN as Jake noticed this flecky glimmer, it seemed to open up like a fan or a parasol. Instead of a streak, it was a blot. This extended further, lazily but noticeably. Jake scowled. And this moved lakeward, without leaving any of itself at the starting-point.

With its greating came somewhat of a brightening, which revealed that the phenomenon had some sort of shape—or perhaps the shape was defining itself as it moved. The blot's edges grew unevenly, receding in places to swell in others. Jake saw that these swellings sprouted into pseudopodal extensions (to quote him, they "jellied out"), that stirred as though groping or reaching. And at the top was a squat roundness, like an undeveloped cranium. The lower rays of light became limbs, striking at the ground as though to walk. The thing counterfeited life, motion—and attention. It was moving toward the water, and toward Sigrid.

Jake did not know what it was, and he says that he was suddenly and extremely frightened. Yet he does not seem to have acted like one who is stricken with fear. What he did, and did at once, was to bawl out a warning to Sigrid, then charge at the mystery.

It had stolen into the moonlight, and Jake encountered it there. As he charged, he tried to make out the details; but what

little it had had of details in the darkness now went misty, as its glow was conquered in the brighter flood of moonglow. Yet it was there, and moving toward Sigrid. She had turned from looking across the water, and now shrank back with a tremulous cry, stumbling and recovering herself ankle-deep in the shallows.

Jake, meanwhile, had flung himself between her and what was coming out of the thicket. He did not wait or even set himself for conflict, but changed direction to face and spring upon the threatening presence. Though past his first youth, he fancied himself as in fairly tough condition, and more than once he had won such impromptu fist-fights as spring up among the too-temperamental folk of the theater. He attacked as he would against a human adversary, sinking his head between his shoulders and flinging his fists in quick succession.

He got home solidly, against something tangible but sickeningly loose beneath its smooth skin or rind. It was like buffeting a sack half full of meal. Though the substance sank in beneath his knuckles, there was no reeling or retreat. A squashy return slap almost enveloped his face, and his spectacles came away as though by suction. At the same time he felt a cable-like embrace, such as he had imagined a python might exert. He smelled putrescence, was close to being sick, and heard, just behind him, the louder screaming of Sigrid.

The fresh knowledge of her danger and terror made him strong again. One arm was free, and he battered gamely with his fist. He found his mark, twice and maybe three times. Then his sickness became faintness when he realized that his knuckles had become slimy wet.

A new force dragged at him behind. Another enemy . . . then a terrible voice of command, the voice of Varduk:

"Let go at once!"

The grasp and the filthy bulk fell away from Jake. He felt his knees waver like shreds of paper. His eyes, blurred without their thick spectacles, could barely discern, not one, but several lumpy forms drawing back. And near him stood Varduk, his facial phosphorescence outgleaming the rotten light of the creatures, his form drawn up sternly in a posture of command.

"Get out!" cried Varduk again. "By what power do you come for your victim now?"

The uncouth shapes shrank out of sight. Jake could not be sure whether they found shelter behind bushes and trees or not; perhaps they actually faded into invisibility. Sigrid had come close, stepping gingerly in her wet shoes, and stooped to retrieve Jake's fallen glasses.

"We owe you our lives," she said to Varduk. "What were those——"

"Never mind," he cut her off. "They will threaten you no more tonight. Go to your beds, and be more careful in the future."

THIS was the story that Jake told me as we drove the final miles to the Lake Jozgid Theater.

He admitted that it had all been a desperate and indistinct scramble to him, and that explanation he had offered next morning when Varduk laughed and accused him of dreaming.

"But maybe it wasn't a dream," Jake said as he finished. "Even if it was, I don't want any more dreams like it."

In the next installment of this strange novel, a corner of the veil concealing the weird identity of Varduk will be lifted. To avoid missing your copy of WEIRD TALES, we suggest that you reserve your copy at your magazine dealers now.

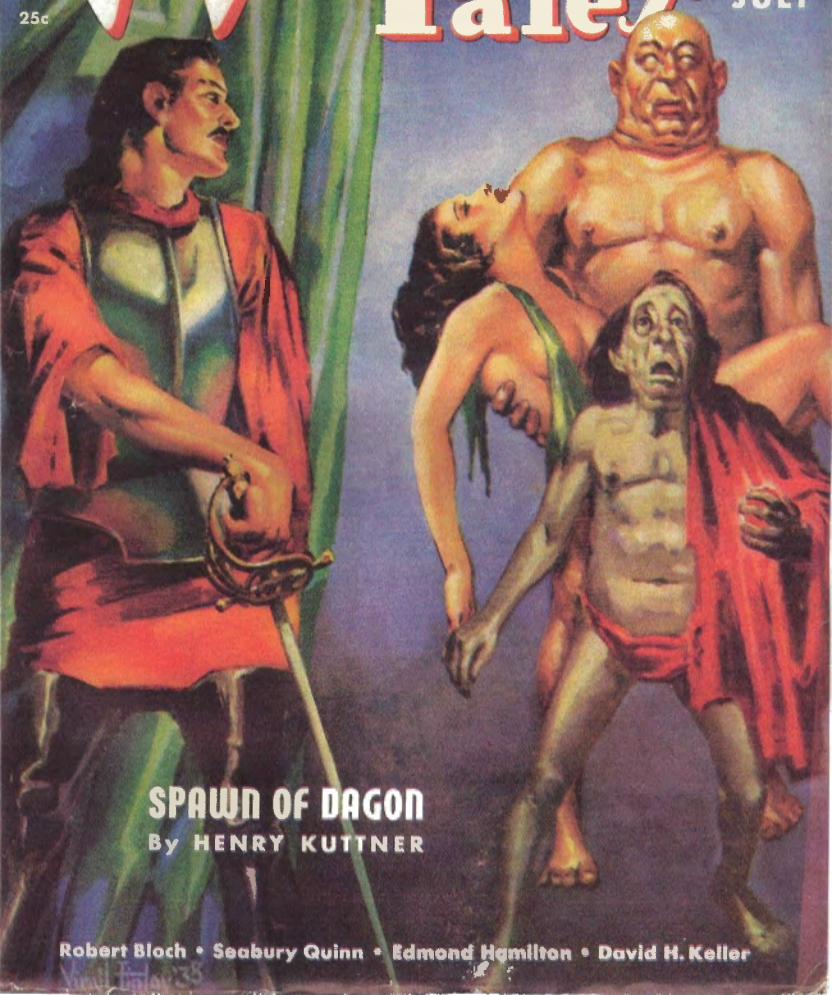


16th Year of Publication

Weird Tales

JULY

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SPAWN OF DAGON

By HENRY KUTTNER

Robert Bloch • Seabury Quinn • Edmond Hamilton • David H. Keller

"There are things against
which ordinary protection
would not suffice."



The Black Drama

By GANS T. FIELD

A strange weird story about the eery personality known as Varduk, who claimed descent from Lord Byron, and the hideous doom that stalked in his wake

The Story So Far

GILBERT CONNATT, the narrator, once a motion picture idol but now penniless, is persuaded by Jake Switz, kindly utility man of the theatrical world, to accept a rôle in the

play *Ruthven*, opposite Sigrid Holgar, Connatt's ex-sweetheart, who since her break with Connatt has become a glamorous film favorite. The play is being produced by Varduk, mysterious new genius of the theater. Other players will include

This story began in WEIRD TALES for June

Elmo Davidson, Varduk's Man Friday, and Martha Vining, character actress.

Rutbven is announced as the lost vampire-demon drama of Lord Byron, and its authenticity is vouched for by Judge Keith Pursuivant, antiquary and occultist, who is convinced that the writing is genuinely Byron's, therefore more than a century old; however, he tells Connatt that the paper on which the play is written was watermarked less than ten years previously.

The play is to open in July at the Lake Jozgid Summer Theater, among upstate New York forests. Connatt arrives, accompanied by Judge Pursuivant, who is vacationing near by. Jake, meeting Connatt, tells a disquieting story of how he and Sigrid were attacked and almost overcome at night by strange, half-defined shapes.

The story continues:

6. *The Theater in the Forest*

JAKE's narrative did not give me cheerful expectations of the Lake Jozgid Theater. It was just as well, for my first glimpse of the place convinced me that it was the exact setting for a play of morbid unreality.

The road beyond Pursuivant's cabin was narrow but not too bad. Jake, driving nimbly over its sanded surface, told me that we might thank the public works program for its good condition. In one or two places, as I think I have said already, the way was cut deeply between knolls or bluffs, and here it was gloomy and almost sunless. Too, the woods thickened to right and left, with taller and taller ranks of trees at the roadside. Springtime's leafage made the trees seem vigorous, but not exactly cheerful; I fancied that they were endowed with intelligence and the power of motion, and that

they awaited only our passing before they moved out to block the open way behind us.

From this sand-surfaced road there branched eventually a second, and even narrower and darker, that dipped down a thickly timbered slope. We took a rather difficult curve at the bottom and came out almost upon the shore of the lake, with the old lodge and its outbuildings in plain view.

These structures were in the best of repair, but appeared intensely dark and weathered, as though the afternoon sky shed a brownish light upon them. The lodge that was now the theater stood clear in the center of the sizable cleared space, although lush-looking clumps and belts of evergreen scrub grew almost against the sheds and the boathouse. I was enough of an observer to be aware that the deep roofs were of stout ax-cut shingles, and that the heavy timbers of the walls were undoubtedly seasoned for an age. The windows were large but deep-set in their sturdy frames. Those who call windows the eyes of a house would have thought that these eyes were large enough, but well able to conceal the secrets and feelings within.

As we emerged from the car, I felt rather than saw an onlooker. Varduk stood in the wide front door of the lodge building. Neither Jake nor I could agree later whether he had opened the door himself and appeared, whether he had stepped into view with the door already open, or whether he had been standing there all the time. His slender, elegant figure was dressed in dark jacket and trousers, with a black silk scarf draped Ascot fashion at his throat, just as he had worn at his hotel in New York. When he saw that we were aware of him, he lifted a white hand in greeting and descended two steps to meet us coming

toward him. I offered him my hand, and he gave it a quick, sharp pressure, as though he were investigating the texture of my flesh and bone.

"I am glad to see you here so soon, Mr. Connatt," he said cordially. "Now we need wait only for Miss Vining, who should arrive before dark. Miss Holgar came yesterday, and Davidson this morning."

"There will be only the six of us, then?" I asked.

He nodded his chestnut curls. "A caretaker will come here each day, to prepare lunch and dinner and to clean. He lives several miles up the road, and will spend his nights at home. But we of the play itself will be in residence, and we alone—a condition fully in character, I feel, with the attitude of mystery and reserve we have assumed toward our interesting production. For breakfasts, Davidson will be able to look after us."

"Huh!" grunted Jake. "That Davidson can act, manage, stage-hand, cook—he does everything."

"Almost everything," said Varduk dryly, and his eyes turned long and expressionlessly upon my friend, who immediately subsided. In the daylight I saw that Varduk's eyes were hazel; on the night I had met him at his hotel they had seemed thunder-dark.

"You, too, are considered useful at many things around the theater, Switz," Varduk continued. "I took that into consideration when Miss Holgar, though she left her maid behind, insisted on including you in the company. I daresay, we can depend on you to help Davidson with the staging and so on."

"Oh, yes, sure," Jake made reply. "Certainly. Miss Holgar, she wants me to do that."

"Very good." Varduk turned on the heel of his well-polished boot. "Sup-

pose," he added over his shoulder, "that you take Mr. Connatt up to the loft of the boathouse. Mr. Connatt, do you mind putting up with Switz?"

"Not in the least," I assured him readily, and took up two of my bags. Jake had already lifted the third and heaviest.

We nodded to Varduk and skirted the side of the lodge, walked down to the water, then entered the boathouse. It was a simple affair of well-chinked logs. Two leaky-looking canoes still occupied the lower part of it, but we picked our way past them and ascended a sturdy staircase to a loft under the peaked roof. This had been finished with wall-board and boasted a window at each end. Two cots, a rug, a wash-stand, a table and several chairs made it an acceptable sleeping-apartment.

"This theater is half-way to the never-never land," I commented as I began to unpack.

"I should live so—I never saw the like of it," Jake said earnestly. "How are people going to find their way here? Yesterday I began to talk about signs by the side of the road. Right off at once, Varduk said no. I begged like a poor relation left out of his uncle's will. Finally he said yes—but the signs must be small and dignified, and put up only a day before the show begins."

I wanted to ask a question about his adventure of the previous night, but Jake shook his head in refusal to discuss it. "Not here," he said. "Gib, who knows who may be listening?" He dropped his voice. "Or even *what* might be listening?"

I lapsed into silence and got out old canvas sneakers, flannel slacks and a Norfolk jacket, and changed into them. Dressed in this easy manner, I left the boathouse and stood beside the lake. At once a voice hailed me. Sigrid was walk-

ing along the water's edge, smiling in apparent delight.

WE CAME face to face; I bent to kiss her hand. As once before, it fluttered under my lips, but when I straightened again I saw nothing of distaste or unsteadiness in her expression.

"Gib, how nice that you're here!" she cried. "Do you like the place?"

"I haven't seen very much of it yet," I told her. "I want to see the inside of the theater."

She took her hand away from me and thrust it into the pocket of the old white sweater she wore. "I think that I love it here," she said, with an air of gay confession. "Not all of the hermit stories about me are lies. I could grow truly fat—God save the mark!—on quiet and serenity."

"Varduk pleases you, too?" I suggested.

"He has more understanding than any other theatrical executive in my experience," she responded emphatically. "He fills me with the wish to work. I'm like a starry-eyed beginner again. What would you say if I told you that I was sweeping my own room and making my own bed?"

"I would say that you were the most charming housemaid in the world."

Her laughter was full of delight. "You sound as if you mean it, Gib. It is nice to know you as a friend again."

It seemed to me that she emphasized the word "friend" a trifle, as though to warn me that our relationship would nevermore become closer than that. Changing the subject, I asked her if she had swum in the lake; she had, and found it cold. How about seeing the theater? Together we walked toward the lodge and entered at a side door.

The auditorium was as Jake had described it to me, and I saw that Varduk liked a dark tone. He had stained the paneling, the benches, and the beams a

dark brown. Brown, too, was the heavy curtain that hid the stage.

"We'll be there tonight," said Sigrid, nodding stageward. "Varduk has called the first rehearsal for immediately after dinner. We eat together, of course, in a big room upstairs."

"May I sit next to you when we eat?" I asked, and she laughed yet again. She was being as cheerful as I had ever known her to be.

"You sound like the student-hero in a light opera, Gib. I don't know about the seating-arrangement. Last night I was at the head of the table, and Varduk at the foot. Jake and Mr. Davidson were at either side of me."

"I shall certainly arrive before one or the other of them," I vowed solemnly.

Varduk had drifted in as we talked, and he chuckled at my announcement.

"A gallant note, Mr. Connatt, and one that I hope you can capture as pleasantly for the romantic passages of our *Rutben*. By the bye, our first rehearsal will take place this evening."

"So Miss Holgar has told me," I nodded. "I have studied the play rather prayerfully since Davidson gave me a copy. I hope I'm not a disappointment in it."

"I am sure that you will not be," he said kindly. "I did not choose disappointing people for my cast."

Davidson entered from the front, to say that Martha Vining had arrived. Varduk moved away, stiff in his walk as I had observed before. Sigrid and I went through the side door and back into the open.

That evening I kept my promise to find a place by Sigrid at the table. Davidson, entering just behind me, looked a trifle chagrined but sat at my other side, with Martha Vining opposite. The dinner was good, with roast mutton, salad and apple

tart. I thought of Judge Pursuivant's healthy appetite as I ate.

After the coffee, Varduk nodded to the old man who served as caretaker, cook and waiter, as in dismissal. Then the producer's hazel eyes turned to Sigrid, who took her cue and rose. We did likewise.

"Shall we go down to the stage?" Varduk said to us. "It's time for our first effort with *Ruthven*."

7. Rehearsal

WE WENT down a back stairway that brought us to the empty stage. A light was already burning, and I remember well that my first impression was of the stage's narrowness and considerable depth. Its back was of plaster over the outer timbers, but at either side partitions of paneling had been erected to enclose the cell-like dressing-rooms. One of the doors bore a star of white paint, evidently for Sigrid. Against the back wall leaned several open frames of wood, with rolls of canvas lying ready to be tacked on and painted into scenery.

Varduk had led the way down the stairs, and at the foot he paused to call upward to Davidson, who remained at the rear of the procession. "Fetch some chairs," he ordered, and the tall subordinate paused to gather them. He carried down six at once, his long strong arms threaded through their open backs. Varduk showed him with silent gestures where to arrange them, and himself led Sigrid to the midmost of them, upstage center.

"Sit down, all," he said to the rest of us. "Curtain, Davidson." He waited while the heavy pall rolled ponderously upward against the top of the arch. "Have you got your scripts, ladies and gentlemen?"

We all had, but his hands were empty.

I started to offer him my copy, but he waved it away with thanks. "I know the thing by heart," he informed me, though with no air of boasting. Remaining still upon his feet, he looked around our seated array, capturing every eye and attention.

"The first part of *Ruthven* is, as we know already, in iambic pentameter—the 'heroic verse' that was customary and even expected in dramas of Byron's day. However, he employs here his usual trick of breaking the earlier lines up into short, situation-building speeches. No long and involved declamations, as in so many creaky tragedies of his fellows. He wrote the same sort of opening scenes for his plays the world has already seen performed—Werner, *The Two Foscari*, *Marino Faliero* and *The Deformed Transformed*."

Martha Vining cleared her throat. "Doesn't *Manfred* begin with a long, measured soliloquy by the central character?"

"It does," nodded Varduk. "I am gratified, Miss Vining, to observe that you have been studying something of Byron's work." He paused, and she bridled in satisfaction. "However," he continued, somewhat maliciously, "you would be well advised to study farther, and learn that Byron stated definitely that *Manfred* was not written for the theater. But, returning to *Ruthven*, with which work we are primarily concerned, the short, lively exchanges at the beginning are Aubrey's and Malvina's." He quoted from memory. "'Scene, Malvina's garden. Time, late afternoon—Aubrey, sitting at Malvina's feet, tells his adventures.' Very good, Mr. Connatt, take your place at Miss Holgar's feet."

I did so, and she smiled in comradely fashion while waiting for the others to drag their chairs away. Glancing at our scripts, we began:

"I'm no Othello, darling."

"Yet I am
Your Desdemona. Tell me of your
travels."

"Of Anthropophagi?"

"And men whose heads
do grow beneath——"

"I saw no such,
Not in all wildest Greece and Macedon."

"Saw you no spirits?"

"None, Malvina—none."

"Not even the vampire, he who quaffs
the blood

Of life, that he may live in death?"

"Not I.
How do you know that tale?"

"I've read
In old romances——"

"Capital, capital," interrupted Varduk pleasantly. "I know that the play is written in a specific meter, yet you need not speak as though it were. If anything, make the lines less rhythmic and more matter-of-fact. Remember, you are young lovers, half bantering as you woo. Let your audience relax with you. Let it feel the verse form without actually hearing."

We continued, to the line where Aubrey tells of his travel-acquaintance Ruthven. Here the speech became definite verse:

"He is a friend who charms, but does
not cheer,

One who commands, but comforts not,
the world.

I do not doubt but women find him
handsome,

Yet hearts must be uneasy at his
glance."

Malvina asks:

"His glance? Is it so piercing when it
strikes?"

And Aubrey:

"It does not pierce—indeed, it rather
weighs,

Like lead, upon the face where it is
fixed."

Followed the story, which I have outlined elsewhere, of the encounter with bandits and Ruthven's apparent sacrifice of himself to cover Aubrey's retreat. Then Martha Vining, as the maid Bridget, spoke to announce Ruthven's coming; and upon the heels of her speech Varduk moved stiffly toward us.

"Aubrey!" he cried, in a rich, ringing tone such as fills theaters, and not at all like his ordinary gentle voice. I made my due response:

"Have you lived, Ruthven? But the horde

Of outlaw warriors compassed you and
struck——"

In the rôle of Ruthven, Varduk's interruption was as natural and decisive as when, in ordinary conversation, he neatly cut another's speech in two with a remark of his own. I have already quoted this reply of Ruthven's:

"I faced them, and who seeks my face
seeks death."

He was speaking the line, of course, without script, and his eyes held mine. Despite myself, I almost staggered under the weight of his glance. It was like that which Aubrey actually credits to Ruthven—lead-heavy instead of piercing, difficult to support.

The rehearsal went on, with Ruthven's seduction of Bridget and his court to the nervous but fascinated Malvina. In the end, as I have synopsised earlier, came his secret and miraculous revival from seeming death. Varduk delivered the final rather terrifying speech magnificently, and then abruptly doffed his Ruthven manner to smile congratulations all around.

"It's more than a month to our opening date in July," he said, "and yet I would be willing to present this play as a

finished play, no later than this day week. Miss Holgar, may I voice my special appreciation? Mr. Connatt, your confessed fear of your own inadequacy is proven groundless. Bravo, Miss Vining—and you, Davidson.” His final tag of praise to his subordinate seemed almost grudging. “Now for the second act of the thing. No verse this time, my friends. Finish the rehearsal as well as you have begun.”

“Wait,” I said. “How about properties? I simulated the club-stroke in the first act, but this time I need a sword. For the sake of feeling the action better——”

“Yes, of course,” granted Varduk. “There’s one in the corner dressing-room.” He pointed. “Go fetch it, Davidson.”

Davidson complied. The sword was a cross-hilt affair, old but keen and bright.

“This isn’t a prop at all,” I half objected. “It’s the real thing. Won’t it be dangerous?”

“Oh, I think we can risk it,” Varduk replied carelessly. “Let’s get on with the rehearsal. A hundred years later, in the same garden. Swithin and Mary, descendants of Aubrey and Malvina, on stage.”

WE CONTINUED. The opening, again with Sigrid and myself a-wooing, was lively and even brilliant. Martha Vining, in her rôle of the centenarian Bridget, skilfully cracked her voice and infused a witch-like quality into her telling of the Aubrey-Ruthven tale. Again the entrance of Ruthven, his suavity and apparent friendliness, his manner changing as he is revealed as the resurrected fiend of another age; finally the clash with me, as Swithin.

I spoke my line—“My ancestor killed you once, Ruthven. I can do the same today.” Then I poked at him with the sword.

Varduk smiled and interjected, “Rather a languid thrust, that, Mr. Connatt. Do you think it will seem serious from the viewpoint of our audience?”

“I’m sorry,” I said. “I was afraid I might hurt you.”

“Fear nothing, Mr. Connatt. Take the speech and the swordplay again.”

I did so, but he laughed almost in scorn. “You still put no life into the thrust.” He spread his hands, as if to offer himself as a target. “Once more. Don’t be an old woman.”

Losing a bit of my temper, I made a genuine lunge. My right foot glided forward and my weight shifted to follow my point. But in mid-motion I knew myself for a danger-dealing fool, tried to recover, failed, and slipped.

I almost fell at full length—would have fallen had Varduk not been standing in my way. My sword-point, completely out of control, drove at the center of his breast—I felt it tear through cloth, through flesh——

A moment later his slender hands had caught my floundering body and pushed it back upon its feet. My sword, wedged in something, snatched its hilt from my hand. Sick and horrified, I saw it protruding from the midst of Varduk’s body. Behind me I heard the choked squeal of Martha Vining, and an oath from Jake Switz. I swayed, my vision seemed to swim in smoky liquid, and I suppose I was well on the way to an unmasculine swoon. But a light chuckle, in Varduk’s familiar manner, saved me from collapsing.

“That is exactly the way to do it, Mr. Connatt,” he said in a tone of well-bred applause.

He drew the steel free—I think that he had to wrench rather hard—and then stepped forward to extend the hilt.

“There’s blood on it,” I mumbled sickly.

"Oh, that?" he glanced down at the blade. "Just a deceit for the sake of realism. You arranged the false-blood device splendidly, Davidson." He pushed the hilt into my slack grasp. "Look, the imitation gore is already evaporating."

So it was, like dew on a hot stone. Already the blade shone bright and clean.

"Very good," said Varduk. "Climax now. Miss Holgar, I think it is your line."

She, too, had been horrified by the seeming catastrophe, but she came gamely up to the bit where Mary pleads for Swithin's life, offering herself as the price. Half a dozen exchanges between Ruthven and Mary, thus:

"You give yourself up, then?"

"I do."

"You renounce your former manners, hopes and wishes?"

"I do."

"You will swear so, upon the book yonder?" (Here Ruthven points to a Bible, open on the garden-seat.)

"I do." (Mary touches the Bible.)

"You submit to the powers I represent?"

"I know only the power to which I pray. 'Our Father, which wert in heaven——'"

Sigrid, as I say, had done well up to now, but here she broke off. "It isn't correct there," she pointed out. "The prayer should read, 'art in heaven.' Perhaps the script was copied wrongly."

"No," said Martha Vining. "It's 'wert in heaven' on mine."

"And on mine," I added.

Varduk had frowned a moment, as if perplexed, but he spoke decisively. "As a matter of fact, it's in the original. Byron undoubtedly meant it to be so, to show Mary's agitation."

Sigrid had been reading ahead. "Farther down in the same prayer, it says almost the same thing—'Thy will be done

on earth as it was in heaven.' It should be, 'is in heaven.'"

I had found the same deviation in my own copy. "Byron hardly meant Mary's agitation to extend so far," I argued.

"Since when, Mr. Connatt," inquired Varduk silkily, "did you become an authority on what Byron meant, here or elsewhere in his writings? You're being, not only a critic, but a clairvoyant."

I felt my cheeks glowing, and I met his heavy, mocking gaze as levelly as I could. "I don't like sacrilegious mistakes," I said, "and I don't like being snubbed, sir."

Davidson stepped to Varduk's side. "You can't talk to him like that, Connatt," he warned me.

Davidson was a good four inches taller than I, and more muscular, but at the moment I welcomed the idea of fighting him. I moved a step forward.

"Mr. Davidson," I said to him, "I don't welcome dictation from you, not on anything I choose to do or say."

Sigrid cried out in protest, and Varduk lifted up a hand. He smiled, too, in a dazzling manner.

"I think," he said in sudden good humor, "that we are all tired and shaken. Perhaps it's due to the unintentional realism of that incident with the sword—I saw several faces grow pale. Suppose we say that the rehearsals won't include so dangerous-looking an attack hereafter; we'll save the trick for the public performance itself. And we'll stop work now; in any case, it's supposed to be unlucky to speak the last line of a play in rehearsal. Shall we, all go and get some rest?"

He turned to Sigrid and offered his arm. She took it, and they walked side by side out of the stage door and away. Martha Vining followed at their heels, while Davidson lingered to turn out the lights. Jake and I left together for our

own boathouse loft. The moon was up, and I jumped when leaves shimmered in its light—I remembered Jake's story about the amorphous lurkers in the thickets.

But nothing challenged us, and we went silently to bed, though I, at least, lay wakeful for hours.

8. Pursuivant Again

WHEN finally I slept, it was to dream in strange, unrelated flashes. The clearest impression of all was that Sigrid and Judge Pursuivant came to lead me deep into the dark woods beyond the lodge. They seemed to know their way through pathless thickets, and finally beckoned me to follow into a deep, shadowed cleft between banks of earth. We descended for miles, I judged in my dream, until we came to a bare, hard floor at the bottom. Here was a wide, round hatchway of metal, like a very large sewer lid. Bidding me watch, Sigrid and the judge bent and tugged the lid up and away. Gazing down the exposed shaft, it was as if I saw the heavens beneath my feet—the fathomlessness of the night sky, like velvet all sprinkled with crumbs of star-fire. I did not know whether to be joyful or to fear; then I had awakened, and it was bright morning.

The air was warmer than it had been the day before, and I donned bathing-trunks and went downstairs, treading softly to let Jake snore blissfully on. Almost at the door of the boathouse I came face to face with Davidson, who smiled disarmingly and held out his hand. He urged me to forget the brief hostility that had come over us at rehearsal; he was quite unforced and cheerful about it, yet I surmised that Varduk had bade him make peace with me. However, I agreed that we had both been tired and upset, and we shook hands cordially.

Then I turned toward the water, and saw Sigrid lazily crawling out into the deep stretches with long, smooth strokes. I called her name, ran in waist-deep, and swam as swiftly as I could, soon catching up. She smiled in welcome and turned on her side to say good-morning. In her brief bathing-suit she did not look so gaunt and fragile. Her body was no more than healthily slim, and quite firm and strong-looking.

As we swam easily, I was impelled to speak of my dream, and she smiled again.

"I think that was rather beautiful, I mean about the heavens below your feet," she said. "Symbolism might have something to say about it. In a way the vision was prophetic—Judge Pursuivant has sent word that he will call on us."

"Perhaps the rest was prophetic, too," I ventured boldly. "You and I together, Sigrid—and heaven at our feet——"

"I've been in long enough," she announced suddenly, "and breakfast must be ready. Come on, Gib, race me back to shore."

She was off like a trout, and I churned after her. We finished neck and neck, separated and went away to dress. At breakfast, which Davidson prepared simply but well of porridge, toast and eggs, I did not get to sit next to Sigrid; Davidson and Jake had found places at her left and right hands. I paid what attentions I could devise to Martha Vining, but if Sigrid was piqued by my courtliness in another direction, she gave no sign.

THE meal over, I returned to my room, secured my copy of *Ruthven* and carried it outdoors to study. I chose a sun-drenched spot near the lodge, set my back to a tree, and leafed through the play, underlining difficult passages here and there. I remembered Varduk's announcement that we would never speak the play's last line in rehearsal, lest bad

luck fall. He was superstitious, for all his apparent wisdom and culture; yet, according to the books Judge Pursuivant had lent me, so was Lord Byron, from whom Varduk claimed descent. What was the ill-omened last line, by the way?

I turned to the last page of the script.

The final line, as typewritten by Davidson, contained only a few words. My eyes found it:

"RUTHVEN (placing his hand on Mary's head):"

And no more than that. There was place for a speech after the stage direction, apparently the monster's involuntary cry for blessing upon the brave girl, but Davidson had not set down such a speech.

Amazed and in some unaccountable way uneasy, I walked around the corner of the lodge to where Martha Vining, seated on the door-step, also studied her lines. Before I had finished my first question, she nodded violently.

"It's the same way on my script," she informed me. "You mean, the last speech missing. I noticed last night, and mentioned it before breakfast to Miss Holgar. She has no last line, either."

A soft chuckle drifted down upon us. Varduk had come to the open door.

"Davidson must have made a careless omission," he said. "Of course, there is only one typescript of the play, with carbon copies. Well, if the last line is missing, isn't it a definite sign that we should not speak it in rehearsal?"

He rested his heavy gaze upon me, then upon Martha Vining, smiled to conclude the discussion, and drew back into the hallway and beyond our sight.

Perhaps I may be excused for not feeling completely at rest on the subject.

Judge Pursuivant arrived for lunch, dressed comfortably in flannels and a tweed jacket, and his performance at table was in healthy contrast to Varduk,

who, as usual, ate hardly anything. In the early afternoon I induced the judge to come for a stroll up the slope and along the main road. As soon as we were well away from the lodge, I told him of Jake's adventure, the outcome of the sword-accident at rehearsal, and the air of mystery that deepened around the omitted final speech of the play.

"Perhaps I'm being nervous and illusion-ridden," I began to apologize in conclusion, but he shook his great head.

"You're being nothing of the sort, Connatt. Apparently my semi-psychic intuition was good as gold. I did perfectly right in following this drama and its company out here into the wilderness."

"You came deliberately?" I asked, and he nodded.

"My friend's cabin in the neighborhood was a stroke of good luck, and I more than half courted the invitation to occupy it. I'll be frank, Connatt, and say that from the outset I have felt a definite and occult challenge from Varduk and his activities."

He chopped at a weed with his big malacca stick, pondered a moment, then continued.

"Your Mr. Varduk is a mysterious fellow. I need not enlarge on that, though I might remind you of the excellent reason for his strange character and behavior."

"Byron's blood?"

"Exactly. And Byron's curse."

I stopped in mid-stride and turned to face the judge. He smiled somewhat apologetically.

"I know, Connatt," he said, "that modern men and women think such things impossible. They think it equally impossible that anyone of good education and normal mind should take occultism seriously. But I disprove the latter impossibility, at least—I hold degrees from three world-famous universities, and my

behavior, at least, shows that I am neither morbid nor shallow."

"Certainly not," I assented, thinking of his hearty appetite, his record of achievement in many fields, his manifest kindness and sincerity.

"Then consent to hear my evidence out." He resumed his walk, and I fell into step with him. "It's only circumstantial evidence, I fear, and as such must not be entirely conclusive. Yet here it is:

"Byron was the ideal target for a curse, not only personally but racially. His forebears occupied themselves with revolution, dueling, sacrilege and lesser sins—they were the sort who attract and merit disaster. As for his immediate parents, it would be difficult to choose a more depraved father than Captain 'Mad Jack' Byron, or a more unnatural mother than Catherine Gordon of Gight. Brimstone was bred into the child's very soul by those two. Follow his career, and what is there? Pride, violence, orgy, disgrace. Over his married life hangs a shocking cloud, an unmentionable accusation—rightly or not we cannot say. As for his associates, they withered at his touch. His children, lawful and natural, died untimely and unhappy. His friends found ruin or death. Even Doctor Polidori, plagiarist of the *Ruthven* story, committed suicide. Byron himself, when barely past his first youth, perished alone and far from home and friends. Today his bright fame is blurred and tarnished by a wealth of legend that can be called nothing less than diabolic."

"Yet he wasn't all unlucky," I sought to remind my companion. "His beauty and brilliance, his success as a poet——"

"All part of the curse. When could he be thankful for a face that drew the love of Lady Caroline Lamb and precipitated one of London's most fearful scandals? As for his poetry, did it not mark him for envy, spite and, eventually, a

concerted attack? I daresay Byron would have been happier as a plain-faced mechanic or grocer."

I felt inclined to agree, and said as much. "If a curse exists," I added, "would it affect Varduk as a descendant of Byron?"

"I think that it would, and that his recent actions prove at once the existence of a curse and the truth of his claim to descent. A shadow lies on that man, Connatt."

"The rest of the similarity holds," I responded. "The charm and the genius. I have wondered why Miss Hölgar agrees to this play. It is archaic, in some degree melodramatic, and her part is by no means dominant. Yet she seems delighted with the rôle and the production in general."

"I have considered the same apparent lapse of her judgment," said Pursuivant, "and came to the conclusion that you are about to suggest—that Varduk has gained some sort of influence over Miss Holgar."

"Perhaps, then, you feel that such an influence would be dangerous to her and to others?"

"Exactly."

"What to do, then?"

"Do nothing, gentlemen," said someone directly behind us.

We both whirled in sudden surprise. It was Elmo Davidson.

9. Davidson Gives a Warning

I SCOWLED at Davidson in surprised protest at his intrusion. Judge Pursuivant did not scowl, but I saw him lift his walking-stick with his left hand, place his right upon the curved handle, and gave it a little twist and jerk, as though preparing to draw a cork from a bottle. Davidson grinned placatingly.

"Please, gentlemen! I didn't mean to cavesdrop, or to do anything else sneak-

ing. It was only that I went for a walk, too, saw the pair of you ahead, and hurried to catch up. I couldn't help but hear the final words you were saying, and I couldn't help but warn you."

We relaxed, but Judge Pursuivant repeated "Warn?" in a tone deeply frigid.

"May I amplify? First of all, Varduk certainly does not intend to harm either of you. Second, he isn't the sort of man to be crossed in anything."

"I suppose not," I rejoined, trying to be casual. "You must be pretty sure, Davidson, of his capabilities and character."

He nodded. "We've been together since college."

Pursuivant leaned on his stick and produced his well-seasoned briar pipe. "It's comforting to hear you say that. I mean, that Mr. Varduk was once a college boy. I was beginning to wonder if he wasn't thousands of years old."

Davidson shook his head slowly. "See here, why don't we sit down on the bank and talk? Maybe I'll tell you a story."

"Very good," agreed Pursuivant, and sat down. I did likewise, and we both gazed expectantly at Davidson. He remained standing, with hands in pockets, until Pursuivant had kindled his pipe and I my cigarette. Then:

"I'm not trying to frighten you, and I won't give away any real secrets about my employer. It's just that you may understand better after you learn how I met him.

"It was more than ten years ago. Varduk came to Revere College as a freshman when I was a junior. He was much the same then as he is now—slender, quiet, self-contained, enigmatic. I got to know him better than anyone in school, and I can't say truly that I know him, not even now.

"Revere, in case you never heard of the place, is a small school with a big

reputation for grounding its students hock-deep in the classics."

Pursuivant nodded and emitted a cloud of smoke. "I knew your Professor Dahlberg of Revere," he interjected. "He's one of the great minds of the age on Greek literature and history."

Davidson continued: "The buildings at Revere are old and, you might say, swaddled in the ivy planted by a hundred graduating classes. The traditions are consistently mellow, and none of the faculty members come in for much respect until they are past seventy. Yet the students are very much like any others, when class is over. In my day, at least, we gave more of a hoot for one touchdown than for seven thousand odes of Horace."

He smiled a little, as though in mild relish of memories he had evoked within himself.

"The football team wasn't very good, but it wasn't very bad, either. It meant something to be on the first team, and I turned out to be a fairish tackle. At the start of my junior year, the year I'm talking about, a man by the name of Schaefer was captain—a good fullback though not brilliant, and the recognized leader of the campus.

"Varduk didn't go in for athletics, or for anything else except a good stiff course of study, mostly in the humanities. He took a room at the end of the hall on the third floor of the men's dormitory, and kept to himself. You know how a college dorm loves that, you men. Six days after the term started, the Yellow Dogs had him on their list."

"Who were the Yellow Dogs?" I asked.

"Oh, there's a bunch like it in every school. Spiritual descendants of the Mohocks that flourished in Queen Anne's reign; rough and rowdy undergraduates, out for Halloween pranks every night.

And any student, particularly any frosh, that stood on his dignity——" He paused and let our imagination finish the potentialities of such a situation.

"So, one noon after lunch at the training-table, Schaefer winked at me and a couple of other choice spirits. We went to our rooms and got out our favorite paddles, carved from barrel-staves and lettered over with fraternity emblems and wise-cracks. Then we tramped up to the third floor and knocked loudly at Varduk's door.

"He didn't answer. We tried the knob. The lock was on, so Schaefer dug his big shoulder into the panel and smashed his way in."

DAVIDSON stopped and drew a long breath, as if with it he could win a better ability to describe the things he was telling.

"Varduk lifted those big, deep eyes of his as we appeared among the ruins of his door. No fear, not even surprise. Just a long look, traveling from one of us to another. When he brought his gaze to me, I felt as if somebody was pointing two guns at me, two guns loaded to their muzzles."

I, listening, felt like saying I knew how he had felt, but I did not interrupt.

"He was sitting comfortably in an armchair," went on Davidson, rocking on his feet as though nervous with the memory, "and in his slender hands he held a big dark book. His forefinger marked a place between the leaves.

"'Get up, frosh,' Schaefer said, 'and salute your superiors.'

"Varduk did not move or speak. He looked, and Schaefer bellowed louder, against a sudden and considerable uneasiness.

"'What are you reading there?' he demanded of Varduk in his toughest voice.

"'A very interesting work,' Varduk
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replied gently. 'It teaches how to rule people.'

"'Uh-huh?' Schaefer sneered at him. 'Let's have a look at it.'

"'I doubt if you would like it,' Varduk said, but Schaefer made a grab. The book came open in his hands. He bent, as if to study it.

"Then he took a blind, lumbering step backward. He smacked into the rest of us all bunched behind him, and without us I think he might have fallen down. I couldn't see his face, but the back of his big bull-neck had turned as white as plaster. He made two efforts to speak before he managed it. Then all he could splutter out was 'Wh-what——' "

Davidson achieved rather well the manner of a strong, simple man gone suddenly shaky with fright.

"'I told you that you probably wouldn't like it,' Varduk said, like an adult reminding a child. Then he got up out of his armchair and took the book from Schaefer's hands. He began to talk again. 'Schaefer, I want to see you here in this room after you finish your football practise this afternoon.'

"Schaefer didn't make any answer. All of us edged backward and got out of there."

Davidson paused, so long that Pursuivant asked, "Is that all?"

"No, it isn't. In a way, it's just the beginning. Schaefer made an awful fool of himself five or six times on the field that day. He dropped every one of his passes from center when we ran signals, and five or six times he muffed the ball at drop-kick practise. The coach told him in front of everybody that he acted like a high school yokel. When we finished and took our showers, he hung back until I came out, so as to walk to the dormitory with me. He tagged along like a frightened kid brother, and when we got to the front door he started upstairs like an

old man. He wanted to turn toward his own room on the second floor; but Varduk's voice spoke his name, and we both looked up, startled. On the stairs to the third flight stood Varduk, holding that black book open against his chest.

"He spoke to Schaefer. 'I told you that I wanted to see you.'"

"Schaefer tried to swear at him. After all, here was a frail, pale little frosh, who didn't seem to have an ounce of muscle on his bones, giving orders to a big football husky who weighed more than two hundred pounds. But the swear words sort of strangled in his throat. Varduk laughed. Neither of you have ever heard a sound so soft or merciless.

"Perhaps you'd like me to come to your room after you," Varduk suggested.

"Schaefer turned and came slowly to the stairs and up them. When he got level with Varduk, I didn't feel much like watching the rest. As I moved away toward my room, I saw Varduk slip his slender arm through Schaefer's big, thick one and fall into step with him, just as if they were going to have the nicest schoolboy chat you can imagine."

Davidson shuddered violently, and so, despite the warm June air, did I. Pursuivant seemed a shade less pink.

"Here, I've talked too much," Davidson said, with an air of embarrassment. "Probably it's because I've wanted to tell this story—over a space of years. No point in holding back the end, but I'd greatly appreciate your promise—both your promises—that you'll not pass the tale on."

WE BOTH gave our words, and urged him to continue. He did so.

"I had barely got to my own digs when there was a frightful row outside, shouts and scamperings and screamings; yes, screamings, of young men scared out of their wits. I jumped up and hurried

downstairs and out. There lay Schaefer on the pavement in front of the dormitory. He was dead, with the brightest red blood all over him. About twenty witnesses, more or less, had seen him as he jumped out of Varduk's window.

"The faculty and the police came, and Varduk spent hours with them, being questioned. But he told them something satisfactory, for he was let go and never charged with any responsibility.

"Late that night, as I sat alone at my desk trying to drive from my mind's eye the bright, bright red of Schaefer's blood, a gentle knock sounded at my door. I got up and opened. There stood Varduk, and he held in his hands that black volume. I saw the dark red edging on its pages, the color of blood three hours old.

"I wondered," he said in his soft voice, 'if you'd like to see the thing in my book that made your friend Schaefer so anxious to leave my room.'

"I assured him that I did not. He smiled and came in, all uninvited.

"Then he spoke, briefly but very clearly, about certain things he hoped to do, and about how he needed a helper. He said that I might be that helper. I made no reply, but he knew that I would not refuse.

"He ordered me to kneel, and I did. Then he showed me how to put my hands together and set them between his palms. The oath I took was the medieval oath of vassalage. And I have kept my oath from that day to this."

Davidson abruptly strode back along the way to the lodge. He stopped at half a dozen paces' distance.

"Maybe I'd better get along," he suggested. "You two may want to think and talk about what I have said, and my advice not to get in Varduk's way."

With that he resumed his departure, and went out of sight without once looking back again.

10. *That Evening*

JUDGE PURSUIVANT and I remained sitting on the roadside bank until Davidson had completely vanished around a tree-clustered bend of the way. Then my companion lifted a heavy walking-boot and tapped the dottle from his pipe against the thick sole.

"How did that cheerful little story impress you?" he inquired.

I shook my head dubiously. My mustache prickled on my upper lip, like the mane of a nervous dog. "If it was true," I said slowly, "how did Davidson dare tell it?"

"Probably because he was ordered to."

I must have stared foolishly. "You think that——"

Pursuivant nodded. "My knowledge of underworld argot is rather limited, but I believe that the correct phrase is 'lay off'. We're being told to do that, and in a highly interesting manner. As to whether or not the story is true, I'm greatly inclined to believe that it is."

I drew another cigarette from my pack-age, and my hand trembled despite itself. "Then the man is dangerous—Varduk, I mean. What is he trying to do to Sigrid?"

"That is what perplexes me. Once, according to your little friend Jake Switz, he defended her from some mysterious but dangerous beings. His behavior argues that he isn't the only power to consider."

The judge held a match for my cigarette. His hand was steady, and its steadiness comforted me.

"Now then," I said, "to prevent—whatever is being done."

"That's what we'd better talk about." Pursuivant took his stick and rose to his feet. "Let's get on with our walk, and make sure this time that nobody overhears us."

We began to saunter, while he continued, slowly and soberly:

"You feel that it is Miss Holgar who is threatened. That's no more than guesswork on your part, supplemented by the natural anxiety of a devoted admirer—if you'll pardon my mentioning that—but you are probably right. Varduk seems to have exerted all his ingenuity and charm to induce her to take a part in this play, and at this place. The rest of you he had gathered more carelessly. It is reasonably safe to say that whatever happens will happen to Miss Holgar."

"But what will happen?" I urged, feeling very depressed.

"That we do not know as yet," I began to speak again, but he lifted a hand. "Please let me finish. Perhaps you think that we should do what we can to call off the play, get Miss Holgar out of here. But I reply, having given the matter deep thought, that such a thing is not desirable."

"Not desirable?" I echoed, my voice rising in startled surprise. "You mean, she must stay here? In heaven's name, why?"

"Because evil is bound to occur. To spirit her away will be only a retreat. The situation must be allowed to develop—then we can achieve victory. Why, Connatt," he went on warmly, "can you not see that the whole atmosphere is charged with active and supernormal perils? Don't you know that such a chance, for meeting and defeating the power of wickedness, seldom arises? What can you think of when you want to run away?"

"I'm not thinking of myself, sir," I told him. "It's Sigrid. Miss Holgar."

"Handsomely put. All right, then; when you go back to the lodge, tell her what we've said and suggest that she leave."

I shook my head, more hopelessly than

before. "You know that she wouldn't take me seriously."

"Just so. Nobody will take seriously the things we are beginning to understand, you and I. We have to fight alone—but we'll win." He began to speak more brightly. "When is the play supposed to have its first performance?"

"Sometime after the middle of July. I've heard Varduk say as much several times, though he did not give the exact date."

Pursuivant grew actually cheerful. "That means that we have three weeks or so. Something will happen around that time—presumably on opening night. If time was not an element, he would not have defended her on her first night here."

I felt somewhat reassured, and we returned from our stroll in fairly good spirits.

Varduk again spoke cordially to Pursuivant, and invited him to stay to dinner. "I must ask that you leave shortly afterward," he concluded the invitation. "Our rehearsals have something of secrecy about them. You won't be offended if——"

"Of course not," Pursuivant assured him readily, but later the judge found a moment to speak with me. "Keep your eyes open," he said earnestly. "He feels that I, in some degree familiar with occult matters, might suspect or even discover something wrong about the play. We'll talk later about the things you see."

THE evening meal was the more pleasant for Judge Pursuivant's high-humored presence. He was gallant to the ladies, deferential to Varduk, and witty to all of us. Even the pale, haunted face of our producer relaxed in a smile once or twice, and when the meal was over and Pursuivant was ready to go, Varduk

accompanied him to the door, speaking graciously the while.

"You will pardon me if I see you safely to the road. It is no more than evening, yet I have a feeling——"

"And I have the same feeling," said Pursuivant, not at all heavily. "I appreciate your offer of protection."

Varduk evidently suspected a note of mockery. He paused. "There are things, Judge Pursuivant," he said, "against which ordinary protection would not suffice. You have borne arms, I believe, yet you know that they will not always avail."

They had come to the head of the front stairs, leading down to the lobby of the theater. The others at table were chattering over a second cup of coffee, but I was straining my ears to hear what the judge and Varduk were saying.

"Arms? Yes, I've borne them," Pursuivant admitted. "Oddly enough, I'm armed now. Should you care to see?"

He lifted his malacca walking-stick in both hands, grasping its shank and the handle. A twist and a jerk, and it came apart, revealing a few inches of metal. Pursuivant drew forth, as from a sheath, a thin, gleaming blade.

"Sword cane!" exclaimed Varduk admiringly. He bent for a closer look.

"And a singularly interesting one," elaborated Pursuivant. "Quite old, as you can see for yourself."

"Ah, so it is," agreed Varduk. "I fancy you had it put into the cane?"

"I did. Look at the inscription."

Varduk peered. "Yes, I can make it out, though it seems worn." He pursed his lips, then read aloud, very slowly: "*Sic pereant omnes inimici tui, Domine.*" It sounds like Scripture."

"That's what it is, Mr. Varduk," Pursuivant was saying blandly. "The King James Version has it: 'So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord.' It's from

Deborah's song — fifth chapter of *Judges*."

Varduk was plainly intrigued. "A war-like text, I must say. What knight of the church chose it for his battle cry?"

"Many have chosen it," responded the judge. "Shall we go on?"

They walked down the stairs side by side, and so out of my sight and hearing.

WHEN Varduk returned he called us at once to rehearsal. He was as alert as he had been the night before, but much harder to please. Indeed, he criticized speeches and bits of stage business that had won his high praise at the earlier rehearsal, and several times he called for repetitions and new interpretations. He also announced that at the third rehearsal, due the next day, he would take away our scripts.

"You are all accomplished actors," he amplified. "You need nothing to refresh good memories."

"I'd like to keep my book," begged Martha Vining, but Varduk smiled and shook his head.

"You'll be better without," he said definitely.

When we approached the climactic scene, with Swithin's attempt to kill Ruthven and Mary's attempted sacrifice, Varduk did not insist on stage business; in fact, he asked us flatly to speak our lines without so much as moving from our places. If this was to calm us after the frightening events of the night before, it did not succeed. Everyone there remembered the accidental sword-thrust, and Varduk's seeming invulnerability; it was as though their thoughts were doleful spoken words.

Rehearsal over—again without the final line by Ruthven—Varduk bade us a courteous good-night and, as before, walked out first with Sigrid and Martha

Vining. I followed with Jake, but at the threshold I touched his arm.

"Come with me," I muttered, and turned toward the front of the lodge.

Varduk and the two women had gone out of sight around the rear of the building. Nobody challenged us as we walked silently in the direction of the road, but I had a sensation as of horrors all around me, inadequately bound back with strands that might snap at any moment.

"What's it about, Gib?" asked Jake once, but at that moment I saw what I had somehow expected and feared to see.

A silent figure lay at the foot of the upward-sloping driveway to the road. We both ran forward, coming up on either side of that figure.

The moon showed through broken clouds. By its light we recognized Judge Pursuivant, limp and apparently lifeless. Beside him lay the empty shank of his walking-stick. His right fist still clenched around the handle, and the slender blade set therein was driven deeply into the loam.

I did not know what to do, but Jake did. He knelt, scooped the judge's head up and set it against his knee, then slapped the flaccid cheeks with his open palm. Pursuivant's eyelids and mustache fluttered.

Jake snorted approvingly and lifted his own crossed eyes to mine. "I guess he's all right, Gib. Just passed out is all. Maybe better you go to Varduk and ask for some brand—"

He broke off suddenly. He was staring at something behind me.

I turned, my heart quivering inside my chest.

Shapes—monstrous, pallid, unclean shapes—were closing in upon us.

In the thrilling chapters that will bring this strange novel to its end in next month's *WEIRD TALES*, the veil is swept aside, and the weird monstrosity known as Varduk stands revealed in all his hideousness. We suggest that you reserve your copy at your magazine dealer's now.

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THE WOLF-GIRL OF JOSSELIN

By ARLTON EADIE

THRILLS!
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The Black Drama

By GANS T. FIELD

A strange weird story about the eery presonality known as Varduk, who claimed descent from Lord Byron, and the hideous doom that stalked in his wake

The Story So Far

GILBERT CONNATT, the narrator, once a film idol, now penniless, takes a rôle in Lord Byron's newly-recovered play, *Ruthven*, opposite Sigrid Holgar, who has become a dramatic success since she and Connatt terminated their Hollywood romance.

Varduk, the brilliant but mysterious producer of the play, intends to present it for the first time in July at the Lake Jozgid Summer Theater, and the cast migrates to that remote, timber-girt spot. The party includes also Elmo Davidson, Varduk's Man Friday, Jake Switz, Sigrid's personal representative, and Martha Vining, character actress.

Judge Keith Pursuivant, eminent oculist and antiquary, who tries to rationalize the apparently authentic Byron handwriting of the play with the fact that it is written on paper less than ten years old, is vacationing near by.

The first unchancy happening is the narrow escape of Sigrid and Jake from strange, half-shaped entities in the dark near the theater building. Then, in a rehearsal, Connatt accidentally stabs Varduk with a sword—but does not hurt him. Pursuivant and Connatt, discussing these events, are warned by Davidson not to challenge Varduk, who is a man of tremendous and uncanny powers.

Later that night, Connatt and Switz find Pursuivant's unconscious form near the forest road from the theater. At the

same moment, the half-shaped creatures that threatened Sigrid appear and surround them.

The story continues:

11. *Battle and Retreat*

I DOUBT if any writer, however accomplished, has ever done full justice to the emotion of terror.

To mention the icy chill at the backbone, the sudden sinewless trembling of the knees, the withering dryness of throat and tongue, is to be commonplace; and terror is not commonplace. Perhaps to remember terror is to know again the helplessness and faintness it brings.

Therefore it must suffice to say that, as I turned and saw the closing in of those pale-glowing blots of menace, I wanted to scream, and could not; to run, and could not; to take my gaze away, and could not.

If I do not describe the oncoming creatures—if creatures indeed they were—it is because they defied clear vision then and defy clear recollection now. Something quasi-human must have hung about them, something suggestive of man's outline and manner, as in a rough image molded by children of snow; but they were not solid like snow. They shifted and swirled, like wreaths of thick mist, without dispersing in air. They gave a dim, rotten light of their own, and they moved absolutely without sound.

"It's them," gulped Jake Switz beside me. He, too, was frightened, but not as frightened as I. He could speak, and move, too—he had dropped Pursuivant's head and was rising to his feet. I could hear him suck in a lungful of air, as though to brace himself for action.

His remembered presence, perhaps the mere fact of his companionship before the unreasoned awfulness of the glow-shadowy pack that advanced to hem us in, give me back my own power of thought and motion. It gave me, too, the impulse to arm myself. I stooped to earth, groped swiftly, found and drew forth from its bed the sword-cane of Judge Pursuivant.

The non-shapes—that paradoxical idea is the best I can give of them—drifted around me, free and weightless in the night air like luminous sea-things in still, dark water. I made a thrust at the biggest and nearest of them.

I missed. Or did I? The target was, on a sudden, there no longer. Perhaps I had pierced it, and it had burst like a flimsy bladder. Thus I argued within my desperate inner mind, even as I faced about and made a stab at another. In the same instant it had gone, too—but the throng did not seem diminished. I made a sweeping slash with my point from side to side, and the things shrank back before it, as though they dared not pass the line I drew.

"Give 'em the works, Gib!" Jake was gritting out. "They can be hurt, all right!"

I laughed, like an impudent child. I felt inadequate and disappointed, as when in dreams a terrible adversary wilts before a blow I am ashamed of.

"Come on," I challenged the undefinable enemy, in a feeble attempt at swagger. "Let me have a real poke at——"

"Hold hard," said a new voice. Judge

Pursuivant, apparently wakened by this commotion all around him, was struggling erect. "Here, Connatt, give me my sword." He fairly wrung it from my hand, and drove back the misty horde with great fanwise sweeps. "Drop back, now. Not toward the lodge—up the driveway to the road."

We made the retreat somehow, and were not followed. My clothing was drenched with sweat, as though I had swum in some filthy pool. Jake, whom I remember as helping me up the slope when I might have fallen, talked incessantly without finishing a single sentence. The nearest he came to rationality was, "What did . . . what if . . . can they——"

Pursuivant, however, seemed well recovered. He kicked together some bits of kindling at the roadside. Then he asked me for a match—perhaps to make me rally my sagging senses as I explored my pockets—and a moment later he had kindled a comforting fire.

"Now," he said, "we're probably safe from any more attention of that bunch. And our fire can't be seen from the lodge. Sit down and talk it over."

Jake was mopping a face as white as tallow. His spectacles mirrored the firelight in nervous shimmers.

"I guess I didn't dream the other night, after all," he jabbered. "Wait till I tell Mister Varduk about this."

"Please tell him nothing," counseled Judge Pursuivant at once.

"Eh?" I mumbled, astonished. "When the non-shapes——"

"Varduk probably knows all about these things—more than we shall ever know," replied the judge. "I rather think he cut short his walk across the front yards so that they would attack me. At any rate, they seemed to ooze out of the timber the moment he and I separated."

He told us, briefly, of how the non-
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shapes (he liked and adopted my paradox) were upon him before he knew. Like Jake two nights before, he felt an overwhelming disgust and faintness when they touched him, began to faint. His last voluntary act was to draw the blade in his cane and drive it into the ground, as an anchor against being dragged away.

"They would never touch that point," he said confidently. "You found that out, Connatt."

"And I'm still amazed, more about that fact than anything else. How would such things fear, even the finest steel?"

"It isn't steel." Squatting close to the fire, Pursuivant again cleared the bright, sharp bodkin. "Look at it, gentlemen—silver."

It was two feet long, or more, round instead of flat, rather like a large needle. Though the metal was bright and worn with much polishing, the inscription over which Pursuivant and Varduk had pored was plainly decipherable by the firelight. *Sic pereant omnes inimici tui, Domine* . . . I murmured it aloud, as though it were a protective charm.

"As you may know," elaborated Judge Pursuivant, "silver is a specific against all evil creatures."

"That's so," interjected Jake. "I heard my grandfather tell a yarn about the old country, how somebody killed a witch with a silver bullet."

"And this is an extraordinary object, even among silver swords," Pursuivant went on. "A priest gave it to me, with his blessing, when I did a certain thing to help him and his parish against an enemy not recognized by the common law of today. He assured me that the blade was fashioned by Saint Dunstan himself."

"A saint make a silver weapon!" I ejaculated incredulously.

PURSUIVANT smiled, exactly as though we had not lately feared and fought for our lives and souls. His manner was that of a kindly teacher with a dull but willing pupil.

"Saint Dunstan is not as legendary or as feeble as his name sounds. As a matter of fact, he flourished heartily in the Tenth Century—not long before the very real Norman Conquest. He was the stout son of a Saxon noble, studied magic and metal-working, and was a political power in England as well as a spiritual one."

"Didn't he tweak Satan's nose?" I inquired.

"So the old poem tells, and so the famous painting illustrates," agreed Pursuivant, his smile growing broader. "Dunstan was, in short, exactly the kind of holy man who would make a sword to serve against demons. Do you blame me for being confident in his work?"

"Look here, Judge," said Jake, "what were those things that jumped us up?"

"That takes answering." Pursuivant had fished a handkerchief from a side pocket and was carefully wiping the silver skewer. "In the first place, they are extra-terrestrial—supernatural—and in the second, they are noisomely evil. We need no more evidence on those points. As for the rest, I have a theory of a sort, based on wide studies."

"What is it, sir?" I seconded Jake. Once again the solid assurance of the judge was comforting me tremendously.

He pursed his lips. "I've given the subject plenty of thought ever since you, Connatt, told me the experience of your friend here. There are several accounts and considerations of similar phenomena. Among ancient occultists was talk of elementary spirits—things super-normal and sometimes invisible, of sub-human intelligence and personality and not to be confused with spirits of the dead. A more modern word is 'elemental', used by sev-

eral cults. The things are supposed to exert influences of various kinds, upon various localities and people

"Again, we have the poltergeist, a phenomenon that is coming in for lively investigation by various psychical scholars of today. I can refer you to the definitions of Carrington, Podmore and Lewis Spence—their books are in nearly every large library—but you'll find that the definitions and possible explanations vary. The most familiar manifestation of this strange but undeniable power is in the seeming mischief that it performs in various houses—the knocking over of furniture, the smashing of mirrors, the setting of mysterious fires——"

"I know about that thing," said Jake excitedly. "There was a house over in Brooklyn that had mysterious fires and stuff."

"And I've read Charles Fort's books—*Wild Talents* and the rest," I supplemented. "He tells about such happenings. But see here, isn't the thing generally traced to some child who was playing tricks?"

Pursuivant, still furbishing his silver blade, shook his head. "Mr. Hereward Carrington, the head of the American Psychical Institute, has made a list of more than three hundred notable cases. Only twenty or so were proven fraudulent, and another twenty doubtful. That leaves approximately seven-eighths unexplained—unless you consider supernatural agency an explanation. It is true that children are often in the vicinity of the phenomena, and some investigators explain this by saying that the poltergeist is attracted or set in motion by some spiritual current from the growing personality of the child."

"Where's the child around here?" demanded Jake. "He must be a mighty bad boy. Better someone should take a stick to him."

"There is no child," answered the judge. "The summoning power is neither immature nor unconscious, but old, wicked and deliberate. Have you ever heard of witches' familiars?"

"I have," I said. "Black cats and toads, with demon spirits."

"Yes. Also grotesque or amorphous shapes—similar, perhaps, to what we encountered tonight—or disembodied voices and hands. Now we are getting down to our own case. The non-shapes—thanks again, Connatt, for the expression—are here as part of a great evil. Perhaps they came of themselves, spiritual vultures or jackals, waiting to share in the prey. Or they may be recognized servants of a vast and dreadful activity for wrong. In any case they are here, definite and dangerous."

Again I felt my nerve deserting me. "Judge Pursuivant," I pleaded, "we must get Miss Holgar out of here."

"No. You and I talked that out this afternoon. The problem cannot be solved except at its climax."

He rose to his feet. The fire was dying.

"I suggest that you go to your quarters. Apparently you're safe indoors, and just now the moon's out from behind the clouds. Keep your eyes open, and stay in the clear. The things won't venture into the moonlight unless they feel sure of you. Anyway, I think they're waiting for something else."

"How about you?" I asked.

"Oh, I'll do splendidly." He held up the sword of Saint Dunstan. "I'll carry this naked in my hand as I go."

We said good-night all around, rather casually, like late sitters leaving their club. Pursuivant turned and walked along the road. Jake and I descended gingerly to the yard of the lodge, hurried across it, and gained our boathouse safely.

12. *Return Engagement*

ONE of the most extraordinary features of the entire happening was that it had so little immediate consequence.

Judge Pursuivant reached his cabin safely, and came to visit us again and again, but never remained after dark. If Varduk knew of the attack by the non-shapes, and if he felt surprize or chagrin that Pursuivant had escaped, he did not betray it. By silent and common consent, Jake and I forbore to discuss the matter between ourselves, even when we knew that we were alone.

Meanwhile, the moon waned and waxed again while we rehearsed our play and between rehearsals swam, tramped and bathed in the sun. Not one of us but seemed to profit by the exercise and fresh air. Sigrid's step grew freer, her face browner and her green-gold hair paler by contrast. I acquired some weight, but in the proper places, and felt as strong and healthy as I had been when first I went from the Broadway stage to Hollywood, eight years before. Even Jake Switz, whose natural habitat lay among theatrical offices and stage doors, became something of a hill-climber, canoeist and fisherman. Only Varduk did not tan, though he spent much time out of doors, strolling with Davidson or by himself. Despite his apparent fragility and his stiffness of gait, he was a tireless walker.

One thing Jake and I did for our protection; that was to buy, on one of our infrequent trips to the junction, an electric flashlight apiece as well as one for Sigrid. These we carried, lighted, when walking about at night, and not once in the month that followed our first encounter with the non-shapes did we have any misadventure.

The middle of July brought the full

moon again, and with it the approach of our opening night.

The theatrical sections of the papers—Varduk had them delivered daily—gave us whole square yards of publicity. Jake had fabricated most of this, on his typewriter in our boathouse loft, though his most glamorous inventions included nothing of the grisly wonders we had actually experienced. Several publishers added to the general interest in the matter by sending to Varduk attractive offers for the manuscript of *Ruthven*, and receiving blunt refusals. One feature writer, something of a scholar of early Nineteenth Century English literature, cast a doubt upon the authenticity of the piece. In reply to this, Judge Pursuivant sent an elaboration of his earlier statement that *Ruthven* was undoubtedly genuine. The newspaper kindly gave this rejoinder considerable notice, illustrating it with photographs of the judge, Varduk and Sigrid.

On July 20, two days before opening, Jake went out to nail signs along the main road to guide motor parties to our theater. He was cheerfully busy most of the morning, and Sigrid deigned to let me walk with her. We did not seek the road, but turned our steps along the brink of the water. An ancient but discernible trail, made perhaps by deer, ran there!

"Happy, Sigrid?" I asked her.

"I couldn't be otherwise," she cried at once. "Our play is to startle the world—first here, then on Broadway——"

"Sigrid," I said, "what is there about this play that has such a charm for you? I know that it's a notable literary discovery, and that it's pretty powerful stuff in spots, but in the final analysis it's only melodrama with a clever supernatural twist. You're not the melodramatic type."

"Indeed?" she flung back. "Am I a type, then?"

I saw that I had been impolitic and

made haste to offer apology, but she waved it aside.

"What you said might well be asked by many people. The pictures have put me into a certain narrow field, with poor Jake Switz wearing out the thesaurus to find synonyms for 'glamorous'. Yet, as a beginner in Sweden, I did *Hedda Gabler* and *The Wild Duck*—yes, and Bernard Shaw, too; I was the slum girl in *Pygmalion*. After that, a German picture, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, with me as Roxane. It was luck, perhaps, and a momentary wish by producers for a new young foreign face, that got me into American movies. But, have I done so poorly?"

"Sigrid, nobody ever did so nobly."

"And at the first, did I do always the same thing? What was my first chance? The French war bride in that farce comedy. Then what? Something by Somerset Maugham, where I wore a black wig and played a savage girl of the tropics. Then what? A starring rôle, or rather a co-starring rôle—opposite you." She gave me a smile, as though the memory were pleasant.

"Opposite me," I repeated, and a thrill crept through me. "*Lavengro*, the costume piece. Our costumes, incidentally, were rather like what we will wear in the first part of *Ruthven*."

"I was thinking the same thing. And speaking of melodrama, what about *Lavengro*? You, with romantic curly sideburns, stripped to the waist and fighting like mad with Noah Beery. Firelight gleaming on your wet skin, and me mopping your face with a sponge and telling you to use your right hand instead of your left——"

"By heaven, there have been lots of worse shows!" I cried, and we both laughed. My spirits had risen as we had strolled away from the lodge grounds, and I had quite forgotten my half-formed resolve to speak a warning.

We came to a stretch of sand, with a great half-rotted pink trunk lying across it. Here we sat, side by side, smoking and scrawling in the fine sand with twigs.

"There's another reason why I have been happy during this month of rehearsal," said Sigrid shyly.

"Yes?" I prompted her, and my heart began suddenly to beat swiftly.

"It's been so nice to be near you and with you."

I felt at once strong and shivery, rather like the adolescent hero of an old-fashioned novel. What I said, somewhat ruefully, was, "If you think so, why have you been so hard to see? This is the first time we have walked or been alone together."

SHE smiled, and in her own individual way that made her cheeks crease and her eyes turn aslant. "We saw a lot of each other once, Gib. I finished up by being sorry. I don't want to be sorry again. That's why I've gone slowly."

"See here, Sigrid," I blurted suddenly. "I'm not going to beat around the bush, or try to lead up diplomatically or dramatically, but—oh, hang it!" Savagely I broke a twig in my hands. "I loved you once, and in spite of the fact that we quarreled and separated, I've never stopped. I love you right this instant——"

She caught me in strong, fierce arms, and kissed me so soundly that our teeth rang together between lips crushed open. Thus for a second of white-hot surprise; then she let go with equal suddenness. Her face had gone pale under its tan—no acting there—and her eyes were full of panicky wonder.

"I didn't do that," she protested slowly. She, too, was plainly stunned. "I didn't. But—well, I did, didn't I?"

"You certainly did. I don't know why, and if you say so I won't ask; but you

did, and it'll be hard to retire from the position again."

After that, we had a lot more to say to each other. I admitted, very humbly, that I had been responsible for our estrangement five years before, and that the reason was the very unmanly one that I, losing popularity, was jealous of her rise. For her part, she confessed that not once had she forgotten me, nor given up the hope of reconciliation.

"I'm not worth it," I assured her. "I'm a sorry failure, and we both know it."

"Whenever I see you," she replied irrelevantly, "bells begin to ring in my ears—loud alarm bells, as if fires had broken out all around me."

"We're triple idiots to think of love," I went on. "You're the top, and I'm the muck under the bottom."

"You'll be the sensation of your life when *Ruthven* comes to Broadway," rejoined Sigrid confidently. "And the movie magnets will fight duels over the chance to ask for your name on a contract."

"To hell with the show business! Let's run away tonight and live on a farm," I suggested.

In her genuine delight at the thought she clutched my shoulders, digging in her long, muscular fingers. "Let's!" she almost whooped, like a little girl promised a treat. "We'll have a garden and keep pigs—no, there's a show."

"And the show," I summed up, "must go on."

On that doleful commonplace we rose from the tree-trunk and walked back. Climbing to the road, we sought out Jake, who with a hammer and a mouthful of nails was fastening his last sign to a tree. We swore him to secrecy with terrible oaths, then told him that we intended to marry as soon as we returned to New York. He half swallowed a nail, choked

dangerously, and had to be thumped on the back by both of us.

"I should live so—I knew this would happen," he managed to gurgle at last. "Among all the men you know, Sigrid Holgar, you got to pick this *schlemiel*!"

We both threatened to pummel him, and he apologized profusely, mourning the while that his vow kept him from announcing our decision in all the New York papers.

"With that romance breaking now, we would have every able-bodied man, woman and child east of the Mississippi trying to get into our show," he said earnestly. "With a club we'd have to beat them away from the ticket window. Standing-room would sell for a dollar an inch."

"It's a success as it is," I comforted him. "*Ruthven*, I mean. The house is a sell-out, Davidson says."

That night at dinner, Sigrid sat, not at the head of the table, but on one side next to me. Once or twice we squeezed hands and Jake, noticing this, was shocked and burned his mouth with hot coffee. Varduk, too, gazed at us as though he knew our secret, and finally was impelled to quote something from Byron—a satiric couplet on love and its shortness of life. But we were too happy to take offense or even to recognize that the quotation was leveled at us.

13. *The Black Book*

OUR final rehearsal, on the night of the twenty-first of July, was fairly accurate as regards the speeches and attention to cues, but it lacked fire and assurance. Varduk, however, was not disappointed.

"It has often been said, and often proven as well, that a bad last rehearsal means a splendid first performance," he reminded us. "To bed all of you, and try to get at least nine hours of sleep." Then

he seemed to remember something. "Miss Holgar."

"Yes?" said Sigrid.

"Come here, with me." He led her to the exact center of the stage. "At this spot, you know, you are to stand when the final incident of the play, and our dialog together, unfolds."

"I know," she agreed.

"Yet—are you sure? Had we not better be sure?" Varduk turned toward the auditorium, as though to gage their position from the point of view of the audience. "Perhaps I am being too exact, yet——"

He snapped his fingers in the direction of Davidson, who seemed to have expected some sort of request signal. The big assistant reached into the pocket of his jacket and brought out a piece of white chalk.

"Thank you, Davidson." Varduk accepted the proffered fragment. "Stand a little closer center, Miss Holgar. Yes, like that." Kneeling, he drew with a quick sweep of his arm a small white circle around her feet.

"That," he informed her, standing up again, "is the spot where I want you to stand, at the moment when you and I have our final conflict of words, the swearing on the Bible, and my involuntary blessing upon your head."

Sigrid took a step backward, out of the circle. I, standing behind her, could see that she had drawn herself up in outraged protest. Varduk saw, too, and half smiled as if to disarm her. "Forgive me if I seem foolish," he pleaded gently.

"I must say," she pronounced in a slow, measured manner, as though she had difficulty in controlling her voice, "that I do not feel that this little diagram will help me in the least."

Varduk let his smile grow warmer, softer. "Oh, probably it will not, Miss

Holgar; but I am sure it will help me. Won't you do as I ask?"

She could not refuse, and by the time she had returned across the stage to me she had relaxed into cheerfulness again. I escorted her to the door of her cabin, and her good-night smile warmed me all the way to my own quarters.

JUDGE PURSUIVANT appeared at noon the next day, and Varduk, hailing him cordially, invited him to lunch.

"I wonder," ventured Varduk as we all sat down together, "if you, Judge Pursuivant, would not speak a few words in our favor before the curtain tonight."

"I?" The judge stared, then laughed. "But I'm not part of the management."

"The management—which means myself—will be busy getting into costume for the first act. You are a scholar, a man whose recent book on Byron has attracted notice. It is fitting that you do what you can to help our opening."

"Oh," said Pursuivant, "if you put it like that—but what shall I tell the audience?"

"Make it as short as you like, but impressive. You might announce that all present are subpoenaed as witnesses to a classic moment."

Pursuivant smiled. "That's rather good, Mr. Varduk, and quite true as well. Very good, count on me."

But after lunch he drew me almost forcibly away from the others, talking affably about the merits of various wines until we were well out of earshot. Then his tone changed abruptly.

"I think we know now that the thing—whatever it is—will happen at the play, and we also know why."

"Why, then?" I asked at once.

"I am to tell the audience that they are 'subpoenaed as witnesses.' In other words, their attention is directed, they must be part of a certain ceremony. I,

too, am needed. Varduk is making me the clerk, so to speak, of his court—or his cult. That shows that he will preside."

"It begins to mean something," I admitted. "Yet I am still at a loss."

Pursuivant's own pale lips were full of perplexity. "I wish that we could know more before the actual beginning. Yet I, who once prepared and judged legal cases, may be able to sum up in part:

"Something is to happen to Miss Holgar. The entire fabric of theatrical activity—this play, the successful effort to interest her in it, the remote theater, her particular rôle, everything—is to perform upon her a certain effect. That effect, we may be sure, is devastating. We may believe that a part, at least, of the success depends on the last line of the play, a mystery as yet to all of us."

"Except to Varduk," I reminded.

"Except to Varduk."

But a new thought struck me, and for a moment I found it comforting.

"Wait. The ceremony, as you call it, can't be all evil," I said. "After all, he asks her to swear on a Bible."

"So he does," Pursuivant nodded. "What kind of a Bible?"

I tried to remember. "To tell the truth, I don't know. We haven't used props of any kind in rehearsals—not even the sword, after that first time."

"No? Look here, that's apt to be significant. We'll have to look at the properties."

We explored the auditorium and the stage with a fine show of casual interest. Davidson and Switz were putting final touches on the scenery—a dark blue backdrop for evening sky, a wall painted to resemble vine-hung granite, benches and an arbor—but no properties lay on the table backstage.

"You know this is a Friday, Gib?" demanded Jake, looking up from where

he was mending the cable of a floodlight. "Bad luck, opening our play on a Friday."

"Not a bit," laughed Pursuivant. "What's begun on a Friday never comes to an end. Therefore——"

"Oi!" crowed Jake. "That means we'll have a record-breaking run, huh?" He jumped up and shook my hand violently. "You'll be working in this show till you step on your beard."

We wandered out again, and Sigrid joined us. She was in high spirits.

"I feel," she said excitedly, "just as I felt on the eve of my first professional appearance. As though the world would end tonight!"

"God forbid," I said at once, and "God forbid," echoed Judge Pursuivant. Sigrid laughed merrily at our sudden expressions of concern.

"Oh, it won't end that way," she made haste to add, in the tone one reserves for children who need comfort. "I mean, the world will begin tonight, with success and happiness."

She put out a hand, and I squeezed it tenderly. After a moment she departed to inspect her costume.

"I haven't a maid or a dresser," she called over her shoulder. "Everything has to be in perfect order, and I myself must see to it."

We watched her as she hurried away, both of us sober.

"I think I know why you fret so about her safety," Pursuivant said to me. "You felt, too, that the thing she said might be a bad omen."

"Then may her second word be a good omen," I returned.

"Amen to that," he said heartily.

Dinnertime came, and Pursuivant and I made a quick meal of it. We excused ourselves before the others—Sigrid looked up in mild astonishment that I

should want to leave her side—and went quickly downstairs to the stage.

ON THE property table lay the cudgel I was to use in the first act, the sword I was to strike with in the second, the feather duster to be wielded by Martha Vining as Bridget, a tray with a wine service to be borne by Davidson as Oscar. There was also a great book, bound in red cloth, with red edging.

"That is the Bible," said Pursuivant at once. "I must have a look at it."

"I still can't see," I muttered, half to myself, "how this sword—a good piece of steel and as sharp as a razor—failed to kill Varduk when I——"

"Never mind that sword," interrupted Judge Pursuivant. "Look at this book, this 'Bible' which they've refused to produce up to now. I'm not surprized to find out that—well, have a look for yourself."

On the ancient black cloth I saw rather spidery capitals, filled with red coloring matter: *Grand Albert*.

"I wouldn't look inside if I were you," warned the judge. "This is in all probability the book that Varduk owned when Davidson met him at Revere College. Remember what happened to one normal young man, ungrounded in occultism, who peeped into it."

"What can it be?" I asked.

"A notorious gospel for witches," Pursuivant informed me. "I've heard of it—Descrepe, the French occultist, edited it in 1885. Most editions are modified and harmless, but this, at first glance, appears to be the complete and infamous Eighteenth Century version." He opened it.

The first phase of his description had stuck in my mind. "A gospel for witches; and that is the book on which Sigrid must swear an oath of renunciation at the end of the play!"

Pursuivant was scowling at the fly-leaf. He groped for his pince-nez, put them on. "Look here, Connatt," he said.

I crowded close to his elbow, and together we read what had been written long ago, in ink now faded to a dirty brown:

Geo Gordon (Biron) his book

At 1 hr. befor midnt, on 22 July, 1788 givin him. He was brot to coeven by Todlin he the saide Geo. G. to be bond to us for 150 yers. and serve for our glory he to gain his title & hav all he desirs. at end of 150 yrs. to give acctg. & not be releasd save by delivring anothr as worthie our coeven.

(Signed)

For coeven
Terragon

For Geo. Gordon (Biron)
Todlin

"And look at this, too," commanded Judge Pursuivant. He laid his great forefinger at the bottom of the page. There, written in fresh blue ink, and in a hand somehow familiar:

This 22nd of July, 1938, I tender this book and quit this service unto Sigrid Holgar.
George Gordon, Lord Byron.

14. Zero Hour

PURSUIVANT closed the book with a loud snap, laid it down on the table, and caught me by the arm.

"Come away from here," he said in a tense voice. "Outside, where nobody will hear." He almost dragged me out through the stage door. "Come along—down by the water—it's fairly open, we'll be alone."

When we reached the edge of the lake we faced each other. The sun was almost set. Back of us, in front of the lodge, we could hear the noise of early arrivals for the theater—perhaps the men who would have charge of automobile parking, the ushers, the cashier.

"How much of what you read was intelligible to you?" asked Pursuivant.

"I had a sense that it was rotten," I said. "Beyond that, I'm completely at sea."

"I'm not." His teeth came strongly together behind the words. "There, on the flyleaf of a book sacred to witches and utterly abhorrent to honest folk, was written an instrument pledging the body and soul of a baby to a 'coeven'—that is, a congregation of evil sorcerers—for one hundred and fifty years. George Gordon, the Lord Byron that was to be, had just completed his sixth month of life."

"How could a baby be pledged like that?" I asked.

"By some sponsor—the one signing the name 'Todlin.' That was undoubtedly a coven name, such as we know all witches took. Terragon was another such cognomen. All we can say of 'Todlin' is that the signature is apparently a woman's. Perhaps that of the child's eccentric nurse, Mistress Gray——"

"This is beastly," I interposed, my voice beginning to tremble. "Can't we do something besides talk?"

Pursuivant clapped me strongly on the back. "Steady," he said. "Let's talk it out while that writing is fresh in our minds. We know, then, that the infant was pledged to an unnaturally long life of evil. Promises made were kept—he became the heir to the estates and title of his grand-uncle, 'Wicked Byron,' after his cousins died strangely. And surely he had devil-given talents and attractions."

"Wait," I cut in suddenly. "I've been thinking about that final line or so of writing, signed with Byron's name. Surely I've seen the hand before."

"You have. The same hand wrote *Ruthven*, and you've seen the manuscript." Pursuivant drew a long breath. "Now we know how *Ruthven* could be written on paper only ten years old. Byron lives and signs his name today."

I felt almost sick, and heartily helpless inside. "But Byron died in Greece," I said, as though reciting a lesson. "His body was brought to England and buried

at Hucknall Torkard, close to his ancestral home."

"Exactly. It all fits in." Pursuivant's manifest apprehension was becoming modified by something of grim triumph. "Must he not have repented, tried to expiate his curse and his sins by an unselfish sacrifice for Grecian liberty? You and I have been over this ground before; we know how he suffered and labored, almost like a saint. Death would seem welcome—his bondage would end in thirty-six years instead of a hundred and fifty. What about his wish to be burned?"

"Burning would destroy his body," I said. "No chance for it to come alive again."

"But the body was not burned, and it has come alive again. Connatt, do you know who the living-dead Byron is?"

"Of course I do. And I also know that he intends to pass something into the hands of Sigrid."

"He does. She is the new prospect for bondage, the 'other as worthie.' She is not a free agent in the matter, but neither was Byron at the age of six months."

The sun's lower rim had touched the lake. Pursuivant's pink face was growing dusky, and he leaned on the walking-stick that housed a silver blade.

"Byron's hundred and fifty years will end at eleven o'clock tonight," he said, gazing shrewdly around for possible eavesdroppers. "Now, let me draw some parallels."

"Varduk—we know who Varduk truly is—will, in the character of Ruthven, ask Miss Holgar, who plays Mary, a number of questions. Those questions, and her answers as set down for her to repeat, make up a pattern. Think of them, not as lines in a play, but an actual interchange between an adept of evil and a neophyte."

"It's true," I agreed. "He asks her if she will 'give herself up,' 'renounce form-

er manners,' and to swear so upon—the book we saw. She does so."

"Then the prayer, which perplexes you by its form. The 'wert in heaven' bit becomes obvious now, eh? How about the angel that fell from grace and attempted to build up his own power to oppose?"

"Satan!" I almost shouted. "A prayer to the force of evil!"

"Not so loud, Connatt. And then, while Miss Holgar stands inside a circle—that, also, is part of the witch ceremony—he touches her head, and speaks words we do not know. But we can guess."

He struck his stick hard against the sandy earth.

"What then?" I urged him on.

"It's in an old Scottish trial of witches," said Pursuivant. "Modern works—J. W. Wickwar's book, and I think Margaret Alice Murray's—quote it. The master of the coven touched the head of the neophyte and said that all beneath his hand now belonged to the powers of darkness."

"No! No!" I cried, in a voice that wanted to break.

"No hysterics, please!" snapped Pursuivant. "Connatt, let me give you one stark thought—it will cool you, strengthen you for what you must help me achieve. Think what will follow if we let Miss Holgar take this oath, accept this initiation, however unwittingly. At once she will assume the curse that Varduk—Byron—lays down. Life after death, perhaps; the faculty of wreaking devastation at a word or touch; gifts beyond human will or comprehension, all of them a burden to her; and who can know the end?"

"There shall not be a beginning," I vowed huskily. "I will kill Varduk——"

"Softly, softly. You know that weapons—ordinary weapons—do not even scratch him."

THE twilight was deepening into dusk. Pursuivant turned back toward the lodge, where windows had begun to glow warmly, and muffled motor-noises bespoke the parking of automobiles. There were other flecks of light, too. For myself, I felt beaten and weary, as though I had fought to the verge of losing against a stronger, wiser enemy.

"Look around you, Connatt. At the clumps of bush, the thickets. What do they hide?"

I knew what he meant. I felt, though I saw only dimly, the presence of an evil host in ambuscade all around us.

"They're waiting to claim her, Connatt. There's only one thing to do."

"Then let's do it, at once."

"Not yet. The moment must be *his* moment, one hour before midnight. Escape, as I once said, will not be enough. We must conquer."

I waited for him to instruct me.

"As you know, Connatt, I will make a speech before the curtain. After that, I'll come backstage and stay in your dressing-room. What you must do is get the sword that you use in the second act. Bring it there and keep it there."

"I've told you and told you that the sword meant nothing against him."

"Bring it anyway," he insisted.

I heard Sigrid's clear voice, calling me to the stage door. Pursuivant and I shook hands quickly and warmly, like teammates just before a hard game, and we went together to the lodge.

Entering, I made my way at once to the property table. The sword still lay there, and I put out my hand for it.

"What do you want?" asked Elmo Davidson behind me.

"I thought I'd take the sword into my dressing-room."

"It's a prop, Connatt. Leave it right where it is."

I turned and looked at him. "I'd rather have it with me," I said doggedly.

"You're being foolish," he told me sharply, and there is hardly any doubt but that I sounded so to him. "What if I told Varduk about this?"

"Go and tell him, if you like. Tell him also that I won't go on tonight if you're going to order me around." I said this as if I meant it, and he relaxed his commanding pose.

"Oh, go ahead. And for heaven's sake calm your nerves."

I took the weapon and bore it away. In my room I found my costume for the first act already laid out on two chairs—either Davidson or Jake had done that for me. Quickly I rubbed color into my cheeks, lined my brows and eyelids, affixed fluffy side-whiskers to my jaws. The mirror showed me a set, pale face, and I put on rather more make-up than I generally use. My hands trembled as I donned gleaming slippers of patent leather, fawn-colored trousers that strapped under the insteps, a frilled shirt and flowing necktie, a flowered waistcoat and a bottle-green frock coat with velvet facings and silver buttons. My hair was long enough to be combed into a wavy sweep back from my brow.

"Places, everybody," the voice of Davidson was calling outside.

I emerged. Jake Switz was at my door, and he grinned his good wishes. I went quickly on-stage, where Sigrid already waited. She looked ravishing in her simple yet striking gown of soft, light blue, with billows of skirt, little puffs of sleeves, a tight, low bodice. Her gleaming hair was caught back into a Grecian-

looking coiffure, with a ribbon and a white flower at the side. The normal tan of her skin lay hidden beneath the pallor of her make-up.

At sight of me she smiled and put out a hand. I kissed it lightly, taking care that the red paint on my lips did not smear. She took her seat on the bench against the artificial bushes, and I, as gracefully as possible, dropped at her feet.

Applause sounded beyond the curtain, then died away. The voice of Judge Pursuivant became audible:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I have been asked by the management to speak briefly. You are seeing, for the first time before any audience, the lost play of Lord Byron, *Ruthven*. My presence here is not as a figure of the theater, but as a modest scholar of some persistence, whose privilege it has been to examine the manuscript and perceive its genuineness.

"Consider yourselves all subpoenaed as witnesses to a classic moment." His voice rang as he pronounced the phrase required by Varduk. "I wonder if this night will not make spectacular history for the genius who did not die in Greece a century and more ago. I say, he did not die—for when does genius die? We are here to assist at, and to share in, a performance that will bring him his proper desserts.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I feel, and perhaps you feel as well, the presence of the great poet with us in this remote hall. I wish you joy of what you shall observe. And now, have I your leave to withdraw and let the play begin?"

Another burst of applause, in the midst of which sounded three raps. Then up went the curtain, and all fell silent. I, as Aubrey, spoke the first line of the play:

"I'm no Othello, darling. . . ."

15. "*Whither? I Dread to Think—*"

SIGRID and I struck on the instant the proper note of affectionate gayety, and I could feel in the air that peculiar audience-rhythm by which an actor knows that his effort to capture a mood is successful. For the moment it was the best of all possible worlds, to be exchanging thus the happy and brilliant lines with the woman I adored, while an intelligent and sympathetic houseful of spectators shared our happy mood.

But, if I had forgotten Varduk, he was the more imposing when he entered. His luminous pallor needed no heightening to seize the attention; his face was set off, like some gleaming white gem, by the dark coat, stock, cape, boots, pantaloons. He spoke his entrance line as a king might speak in accepting the crown and homage of a nation. On the other side of the footlights the audience grew tense with heightened interest.

He overpowered us both, as I might have known he would, with his personality and his address. We might have been awkward amateurs, wilting into nothingness when a master took the stage. I was eclipsed completely, exactly as Aubrey should be at the entrance of Ruthven, and I greatly doubt if a single pair of eyes followed me at my first exit; for at the center of the stage, Varduk had begun to make love to Sigrid.

I returned to my dressing-room. Pursuivant sat astride a chair, his sturdy forearms crossed upon its back.

"How does it go?" he asked.

"Like a producer's dream," I replied, seizing a powder puff with which to freshen my make-up. "Except for the things we know about, I would pray for no better show."

"I gave you a message in my speech before the curtain. Did you hear what I said? I meant, honestly, to praise Byron

and at the same time to defy him. You and I, with God's help, will give *Ruthven* an ending he does not expect."

It was nearly time for me to make a new entrance, and I left the dressing-room, mystified but comforted by Pursuivant's manner. The play went on, gathering speed and impressiveness. We were all acting inspiredly, maugre the bizarre nature of the rehearsals and other preparations, the dark atmosphere that had surrounded the piece from its first introduction to us.

The end of the act approached, and with it my exit. Sigrid and I dragged the limp Varduk to the center of the stage and retired, leaving him alone to perform the sinister resurrection scene with which the first act closes. I loitered in the wings to watch, but Jake Switz tugged at my sleeve.

"Come," he whispered. "I want to show you something."

We went to the stage door. Jake opened it an inch.

The space behind the lodge was full of uncertain, half-formed lights that moved and lived. For a moment we peered. Then the soft, larval radiances flowed toward us. Jake slammed the door.

"They're waiting," he said.

From the direction of the stage came Varduk's final line:

"Grave, I reject thy shelter! Death, stand back!"

Then Davidson dragged down the curtain, while the house shook with applause. I turned again. Varduk, back-stage, was speaking softly but clearly, urging us to hurry with our costume changes. Into my dressing-room I hastened, my feet numb and my eyes blurred.

"I'll help you dress," came Pursuivant's calm voice. "Did Jake show you what waits outside?"

I nodded and licked my parched, painted lips.

"Don't fear. Their eagerness is premature."

He pulled off my coat and shirt. Grown calm again before his assurance, I got into my clothes for Act Two—a modern dinner suit. With alcohol I removed the clinging side-whiskers, repaired my make-up and brushed my hair into modern fashion once more. Within seconds, it seemed, Davidson was calling us to our places.

The curtain rose on Sigrid and me, as Mary and Swithin, hearing the ancestral tale of horror from Old Bridget. As before, the audience listened raptly, and as before it rose to the dramatic entrance of Varduk. He wore his first-act costume, and his manner was even more compelling. Again I felt myself thrust into the background of the drama; as for Sigrid, great actress though she is, she prospered only at his sufferance.

Off stage, on again, off once more—the play was Varduk's, and Sigrid's personality was being eclipsed. Yet she betrayed no anger or dislike of the situation. It was as though Varduk mastered her, even while his character of Ruthven overpowered her character of Mary. I felt utterly helpless.

IN THE wings I saw the climax approach. Varduk, flanked by Davidson as the obedient Oscar, was declaring Ruthven's intention to gain revenge and love.

"Get your sword," muttered Jake, who had taken Davidson's place at the curtain ropes. "You're on again in a moment."

I ran to my dressing-room. Pursuivant opened the door, thrust something into my hand.

"It's the silver sword," he told me quickly. "The one from my cane. Trust in it, Connatt. Almost eleven o'clock—go, and God stiffen your arm."

It seemed a mile from the door to the wings. I reached it just in time for my entrance cue—Sigrid's cry of "Swithin will not allow this."

"Let him try to prevent it," grumbled Davidson, fierce and grizzled as the devil-converted Oscar.

"I'm here for that purpose," I said clearly, and strode into view. The sword from Pursuivant's cane I carried low, hoping that Varduk would not notice at once. He stood with folded arms, a mocking smile just touching his white face.

"So brave?" he chuckled. "So foolish?"

"My ancestor killed you once, Ruthven," I said, with more meaning than I had ever employed before. "I can do so again."

I leaped forward, past Sigrid and at him.

The smile vanished. His mouth fell open.

"Wait! That sword——"

He hurled himself, as though to snatch it from my hand. But I lifted the point and lunged, extending myself almost to the boards of the stage. As once before, I felt the flesh tear before my blade. The slender spike of metal went in, in, until the hilt thudded against his breast-bone.

No sound from audience or actors, no motion. We made a tableau, myself stretched out at lunge, Varduk transfixed, the other two gazing in sudden aghast wonder.

For one long breath's space my victim stood like a figure of black stone, with only his white face betraying anything of life and feeling. His deep eyes, gone dark as a winter night, dug themselves into mine. I felt once again the intolerable weight of his stare—yet it was not threatening, not angry even. The surprise

ebbed from it, and the eyes and the sad mouth softened into a smile. Was he forgiving me? Thanking me? . . .

SIGRID found her voice again, and screamed tremulously. I released the cane-hilt and stepped backward, automatically. Varduk fell limply upon his face. The silver blade, standing out between his shoulders, gleamed red with blood. Next moment the red had turned dull black, as though the gore was a millennium old. Varduk's body sagged. It shrank within its rich, gloomy garments. It crumbled.

The curtain had fallen. I had not heard its rumble of descent, nor had Sigrid, nor the stupefied Davidson. From beyond the folds came only choking silence. Then Pursuivant's ready voice.

"Ladies and gentlemen, a sad accident has ended the play unexpectedly—tragically. Through the fault of nobody, one of the players has been fatally——"

I heard no more. Holding Sigrid in my arms I told her, briefly and brokenly, the true story of *Ruthven* and its author. She, weeping, gazed fearfully at the motionless black heap.

"The poor soul!" she sobbed. "The poor, poor soul!"

Jake, leaving his post by the curtain-ropes, had walked on and was leading away the stunned, stumbling Davidson.

I still held Sigrid close. To my lips, as if at the bidding of another mind and memory, came the final lines of *Manfred*:

"He's gone—his soul hath ta'en its earthless flight—Whither? I dread to think—but he is gone."

[THE END]



16th Year of Publication

Weird Tales

AUG.

25c

THE WOLF-GIRL OF JOSSELIN

By ARLTON EADIE

THRILLS!
MYSTERY!
EXCITEMENT!



SEABURY QUINN • H. THOMPSON RICH • EDMOND HAMILTON • GANS T. FIELD



Dead Dog

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

*A huge black dog it was, with but one reason for existence:
to avenge its dead master*

"Dead dogs may bite the careless feet.—
Umbundu proverb.

THEY brought the rebel chief Kafilatala out of the jungle to Father Labossier's mud-brick house, brought him in a *tepoia* because he still limped from a Portuguese bullet in his thigh. Twenty black warriors, clicking their spears respectfully, followed the hammock-litter and formed a row outside the stockade as Kafilatala dismounted and hobbled up the path.

Springing from his seat on the porch,

Father Labossier walked swiftly to meet his old friend. The chief was lean, taller by a head than the sturdy priest, and black as basalt save for a gray scar across his proud face from eye to nostril. The two men said the requisite *Kalungu* greetings and sat on a log under the broad-leaved fig-tree. Then Kafilatala spoke:

"Your advice came to me in my hiding. I cannot hope to win against the Portuguese soldiers; now I must surrender and save my people further punishment."

"That is wise, Kafatala," nodded Father Labossier, smiling. Nine years in west Africa had not dulled the missionary zeal that had stirred him from a pleasant curé of souls near Antwerp, and moments like this repaid him for long toil. "The white man's Savior, of whom I told you," he continued, "will make your sentence a light one."

The scar darkened on Kafatala's face and his wide lips tightened. "My people will suffer no more, that is all. Rodriguez, the Portuguese captain, will kill me."

The priest held up a hand in protest. "Not all Portuguese are cruel. It is true that Captain Rodriguez's heart is sick; he was sent here because he had sinned against the laws at home——"

"However he came here, he will kill me." Kafatala fairly jerked out the words, then apologized for interrupting. "Good-bye, my father. We shall meet again."

Still Father Labossier argued. "A power will save you, Kafatala."

"A power may avenge me," was the bleak reply. "That is all."

Father Labossier brought notebook and pencil from his pocket and scribbled a note as he sat.

"This asks that you be treated kindly," he explained. "My fastest servant will bear it to the fort ahead of you."

The chief thanked him courteously, and rose. "One favor before I go."

"Name it."

Kafatala emitted a chirping whistle. At once something black and swift sped from behind the row of warriors, dashed through the gate and up the path—a huge, shaggy hound, as black as thunder. It was as large as a calf, and its eyes shone with an uneasy greenish pallor. Yet it seemed gentle, thrusting its long, ugly head under the chief's hand.

"Will you keep my dog for me?" asked Kafatala.

"Until you come back," agreed Father Labossier.

"I do not come back," insisted the other, and Father Labossier changed the subject by asking how the beast was called.

"Ohondongela," replied the master.

That word means "revenge" in the Umbundu, and Father Labossier, eyeing the dog, thought it as fierce as its name. Black, rough, lean, powerful of jaw and long of fang, it had something of the forbidding wild about it, almost like a forest beast; but all dogs were once forest beasts, at the beginning of time. . . .

Kafatala again excused himself for cutting the visit short, spoke commandingly to Ohondongela, and smiled when the brute curled himself obediently at the feet of Father Labossier. Then he stumped to the gate, crept into his *tepoia* and gave the signal for the march to continue.

THREE days later Father Labossier was wakened before dawn by the dismal howling of Kafatala's hound. He grumbled sleepily, then reflected that a man of God must not think unkindly, even of a beast. He rose, took an early breakfast, pottered among the lettuces in his garden and at noon read a marriage service over a giggling young couple that wanted white man's magic for good luck in its new household. Afterward he wrote letters to a favorite nephew, to a group of fellow-priests at home, and to the Dutch trader who sent him supplies from Benguela. At about four o'clock in the afternoon a chorus of shouts from his servants betokened a stranger coming up the trail.

It was a runner, bare-legged and wearing a faded khaki shirt, who advanced to the porch, saluted in clumsy military fashion, and offered a parcel sewn in rice-sacking.

"From the fort," the runner told him. "Captain Rodriguez has sent it."

"Thank you." Some answer, of course, to his plea for mercy to Kafilatala. But why a package and no letter? There must be a note inside.

Producing a clasp-knife, the priest ripped the sacking.

A face looked up at him through the ragged hole—a black, dead face. Upon it a pallid gray scar ran from eye to nostril. Kafilatala had been right; Captain Rodriguez had made short work of him, and thus was answering Father Labossier's recommendations of mercy.

Again rose the doleful wail of Ohondongela the hound. And just before sunset the great beast lay down and died, quietly, quickly and inexplicably.

THREE moons had waned and waxed again, and the same runner from the fort met Father Labossier just outside his stockade. It was midafternoon, as on the runner's previous appearance, and again he had something from Captain Rodriguez—not a package this time, but a letter.

The priest took the envelope and gazed for a moment at the almost indecipherable characters that spelled his own name upon it. They had been set down by a shaking hand, a hand that he knew as the captain's. He had written to Rodriguez on the same day that he had received Kafilatala's head; he had stiffly indicted the officer as a cruel and cowardly murderer, and had sent a duplicate of the letter to the governor at Loanda. Nobody had replied—was this a belated acknowledgment of his message, perhaps a justification of Rodriguez's action or a further sneer at the priest?

He opened the letter and read it, his kindly face spreading over with wonder. For Rodriguez was praying for help and comfort in the name of Christian mercy

and priestly compassion. The last phrase, in particular, was out of character: "I know I have sinned, yet ask for the aid I do not deserve."

The priest lifted his eyes to the waiting runner. "Go back and say that I will come tomorrow."

The native paused, embarrassed, then replied diffidently that his master was in dreadful case and that there was no white doctor to do magic for his healing. Could not Father Labossier come at once?

"It will be an all-night trek," demurred the priest. Then he thought better of his hesitancy, and added, "But a moon will shine. I shall go with you."

He changed into flannel shirt, walking-boots and a wide hat. Upon his shoulder he slung a canteen and a musette with medicines. In his pocket were prayer-book and Bible. From his little arsenal he chose a hunting-rifle, for lions might be hunting along the night trail. Then, placing his oldest servant in charge of the house, he set off with the man from the fort.

IT WAS a wearying tramp by moonlight, and an eventful one. At sunrise he came to the fort, where, brooding in his quarters over untasted food, Captain Rodriguez waited for him.

Father Labossier was shocked at sight of the Portuguese. When they had last met, four months previously, Rodriguez had been florid, swaggering, vigorous. Now he sagged shrunkently inside his dirty white uniform. The face he lifted was pale, its eyes wild, and his once-jauanty mustache drooped.

"Father," he mumbled hoarsely, "I am ridden by devils."

Father Labossier took the captain's hand. It trembled in his grasp. "I do not doubt you, my son," he replied gravely. "Yours has been an evil life."

Rodriguez grimaced in doleful accept-

ance of the reproof. "Come, let us sit on the porch—in the blessed moonlight."

Outside, they took canvas chairs. Rodriguez sighed as if in exhaustion, gazed for a moment across the bare drill-ground toward the barracks of the native soldiers. Then:

"My sins crouch beside my bed at night."

The priest waited for a moment. When his companion did not continue, he said tentatively: "Seek forgiveness from the Lord."

"If I could!" Rodriguez leaned toward him, and his breath in Father Labossier's face was the breath of a sick man. "A Christian God cannot be invoked—only a savage devil, to spare me."

Father Labossier fingered the silver cross that hung from his neck. "That thought is a transgression, my son. Unsay it."

The captain clutched his face in wasted hands and his shoulders shook, as with sobs. Finally he forced himself to speak of what lay upon his soul.

Three nights before, he had retired, as usual, to his lonely bedchamber. He spoke of his habitual preparations; the examination of the windows to see if their gratings and mosquito nets were in place, his locking of the door against possible night prowlers, his placing of a service pistol beside the water glass on his bedside table. Nothing untoward had happened during the day; it had been even tiresome. His thoughts before slumber had taken the form of an idle review of his work and a wistful consideration of his chances to be forgiven certain indiscretions and called home to Portugal. Then he had dozed off, to wake suddenly and in fear.

At this point in his narrative, he hid his face again and shuddered uncontrollably. Father Labossier laid a hand on the

W. T.—7

captain's arm, and strength flowed from him into that shaken frame.

"I looked toward the window, and there I saw it. Blood of the saints, I saw it! By the window—a great dog!"

"Dog?" repeated the other, leaning forward in his turn. "What sort of a dog?"

"Large—black and shaggy. It was sitting up, and its head and shoulders rose above the window-sill, making a silhouette against the moonlight. Its eyes, like green lamps of hell, stared at me. The hate in them!" Captain Rodriguez's face twitched with the memory.

"I see. And then?"

"I screamed, a thing I have not done since I was a baby. A moment later, my orderly was pounding and calling at the door; and the dog—had gone."

"Gone!" echoed the priest.

"Yes, vanished like a candle-flame snuffed."

Father Labossier clicked his tongue. "Was it not a dream, that?"

Captain Rodriguez laughed, but not merrily. He had thought that very thing, he admitted, though he was too nervous to sleep any more that night. In the morning he had forced himself to forget the adventure and had gone about his duties with a heart that grew lighter as the day progressed. By nightfall the nervousness returned, and he lulled himself to sleep with a bromide.

"Again—mark me, Father—again I saw to windows, mosquito netting, lock. I put from me the troublesome vision of the night before. I slept."

Father Labossier took a cigar from his pocket. "The dream——"

"It was no dream, I say. When does a dream come twice in two nights?" The captain's lips twitched, showing teeth that were set as though to hold back a dreadful pain. "The dog returned. I woke in

sudden instinctive fear, and there it was as before. No, not as before."

"What do you mean?" asked Father Labossier, biting the end of his cigar.

"It had been at the window the first time. Now it was at the foot of my bed, nearer to me by half the floor's width." Rodriguez laid his fist to his lips, as though to crush their trembling. "It was so large as to look over the footboard at me. Its green eyes burned into mine."

Father Labossier said, very quietly, that a real dog could not have looked Rodriguez in the eye.

"No, and this was no real dog. It was my gaze that faltered, and I screamed aloud."

"As before?"

"Yes, as before. And my orderly came, bearing a light that shed itself through the cracks of the door. At that beam, the thing was gone, completely and instantly. I rose to let the orderly in—never have I allowed a native to see me so upset."

Father Labossier rubbed a match on the sole of his boot. "And then, my son?"

"In the morning I sent for you. But last night, while you were on the trail—last night, the dreadful dog from hell visited me yet again!"

He flung out a hand, palm vertical. "No farther away than that, it sat at my side. It breathed upon me, I heard the growl in its throat. And somehow I snatched up the pistol from my table and fired into its face—it vanished. But to-night—*it will not vanish!*"

HIS voice had risen to a wail. Again the priest's strong, steady hand clutched his companion's quivering one, calming the frantic shivers.

"You have fancied these things, my son."

"But I swear they are true, by every saint in the calendar. Come, Father, to my room. You shall see for yourself."

Still murmuring set phrases of comfort, Father Labossier followed Rodriguez back into the house. The captain's sleeping-compartment was comfortable and even luxurious beyond military requirements, appointed as he had described.

"See," urged Rodriguez, laying an unsteady finger upon the door-jamb. "This round hole—my bullet made it."

"I see it," Father Labossier assured him.

"And you observe the gratings and nets at the window? The lock on my door? Well, then——"

Father Labossier cleared his throat. He was well-read, and something of an amateur psychologist. "My son, you knew, perhaps, that Chief Kafatala had a great black hound."

"Did he? I never saw it."

"You had heard, perhaps, of the beast. Its name was Ohondongela."

Rodriguez bit his lips. "Ohondongela—revenge." He calmed himself and said that he might have heard of it.

"Ah, then," said Father Labossier, "it has become a symbol with you, my son, of the wrong your heart's core has admitted."

Much more he said, drawing upon Freud and the gospels in turn. Captain Rodriguez listened carefully, nodding from time to time as though he comprehended the argument and was disposed to agree.

"But if this is the truth," he said when the priest had made an end, "what am I to do?"

"You have begun by repenting and confessing," Father Labossier told him. "Tonight——"

"Tonight!" gasped Rodriguez, turning pale.

"Do not fear. Go to bed as usual, composing yourself. I shall sit up in the parlor. If the dream returns, call me—softly. We will deal with it together."

Rodriguez drew a deep breath, as of relief. "I am hungry," he said suddenly. "You, Father, have not breakfasted. Forgive me my neglect, and be my guest."

TOWARD nightfall Captain Rodriguez became nervous, meditative and boastful by turns. Once he spoke of native magic and twice of charms against the devil. Again, forgetting his abject admission of wrong, he loudly argued that he was justified in executing Kafilatala. He invited Father Labossier to drink with him and, when the priest refused, drank by himself. He drank entirely too much, and picked up his guitar to sing the sun down with a gay ballad. But as dusk fell he turned solemn once more and threw the instrument aside.

"Father," he muttered, "are you sure all will be well?"

"I am sure of nothing," Father Labossier felt obliged to reply. "I am very hopeful; that is all."

Rodriguez lifted his shoulders, but the shrug ended in a shiver. "Let me sit up with you," he begged. "We will talk."

"We have already talked. The best way to solve this evil is to face it."

Some time later the captain drank yet more, said good-night and went into his bedroom.

Sitting alone in the parlor, Father Labossier examined the bookshelf. It bore several weighty works on military science and tactics, and a row of Portuguese novels. From among these he selected *Rhum Azul*, by Ernest Souza. As he scanned the first page he sighed with relish. It was a mystery-adventure tale, and Father Labossier, though devout, was not disdainful of such fare. Indeed, after the Scriptures

and the writings of the saints, he enjoyed best Edgar Allan Poe, Maurice Leblanc and the *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. This story would help him while away the hours. He savored a chapter, a second, a third. . . .

The calm night tore open before a blood-banishing scream of fear and agony.

Dropping the book, Father Labossier sprang to his feet. In three quick strides he crossed to the door of Rodriguez's bedroom. Even as he reached it, the scream rose higher, died suddenly, and a spatter of pistol shots rang out. Then a second voice, inhuman and savage, the jabbering snarl of a beast at the kill——

The door was locked. Father Labossier shook the knob futilely, then turned as a native orderly rushed in from the rear of the house. Together they flung their shoulders against the panel. A second time. The lock gave, the door drove in. The orderly paused to catch up a lamp, and the priest stepped across the threshold.

He shrank back, staring into the gloom. Something dark and hunched was squirming violently upon the bed. Then, as the orderly lifted the light above Father Labossier's shoulder, that shape was gone.

The two men stared and wondered. The gratings and nets were in place. Nowhere along the tight walls could even a beetle find entrance or exit.

But Captain Rodriguez lay still among the tumbled sheets. His throat had been ripped out to the neckbone. One hand clutched his revolver, the other a tuft of shaggy black hair—such hair as had grown upon Ohondongela, the long-dead hound of the long-dead Kafilatala.



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A romantic and intriguing
tale of witchcraft

By
SEABURY QUINN



ALGERNON BLACKWOOD • ROBERT E. HOWARD

The Cavern

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN and
GERTRUDE GORDON

A brief story about a doomed man who seemed to bear a charmed life

We tread the steps appointed for us; and he whose steps are appointed must tread them.

—*The Arabian Nights.*

THE old fortune-teller had done with her prattle about crossing water and receiving letters full of money. She gathered up her grimy deck of cards and shuffled away, leaving Stoll and me to finish our dinner under soft lights, accompanied by soft music. I sighed and wondered aloud why the hag had singled us out of all the patrons in the crowded restaurant.

"Because she knew I believe," replied Stoll as he poured wine.

I was amazed and a bit shocked. "You believe in fortune-tellers? Nobody of education and intelligence can possibly——"

"Granted that I have no education and intelligence, but I believe." He was quite solemn. "I've seen one come true."

I dared hope for one of Stoll's rare stories. Why do men like Stoll, who have seen so much and behaved so well in far places, keep their mouths shut? I waited, and eventually he added:

"It wasn't my fortune, but Swithin Quade's."

"Swithin Quade," I repeated eagerly. "The African Quade? The one in the Sunday feature sections?"

"Right. I met him on his first day in Africa."

SWITHIN QUADE was the sort of budding empire-builder Kipling used to write about [began Stoll]. You know what I mean—broad shoulders, long legs,

golden-brown curls, eyes like the April sky, close-clipped young mustache, close-clipped young attitudes, and adventure hunger enough for all the explorers since the launching of the Argo. His people had no money, but they had managed to educate him well, and through influential friends he'd been signed up to cut his teeth on the tomb of a priest-noble of the Hyksos, up Nile a way. I was camp and digging chief on that job, under Thomson, the big Egyptology pot.

Alexandria was even more garish then than now—there was considerable tourist money, and no war scare. As soon as Quade hit the dock he wanted to see dancers, snake-charmers, mosques and all the rest of it. I took him 'round, because Thomson was busier than I and didn't know so many places. Quade and I wound up late the first afternoon in a loudish spot, with striped awnings, and mutton stew, and hashish in the coffee. A bunch of vicious-looking blacks were belting away at drums and wailing on pipes, and a very dirty and ragged old Arab sidled up to whine for "*Bakshish!*"

I warned him off with the traditional "*Mafish!*", and tried to ignore him. But the old duffer—bent he was, and dried up like a bunch of raisins—began to plead for a chance to tell fortunes. Quade asked what it was about, and I explained.

"Good egg," said Quade at once, his face as bright and happy as a child's behind that trim mustache. "Have him tell mine."

The walking mummy understood

Quade's enthusiastic manner, if not his English, and right away set down his little tray of polished wood on the edge of our table. Then he poured sand on the tray, from an old tobacco pouch. He began to fiddle with his scrawny fingers, making little rifts and ridges and hills.

"Good egg," Quade repeated. "This blighter is just what I hoped to run into. Picturesque and all that—hurry up, old fellow!" And his smile grew wider.

But the sand diviner did not smile back. He only paddled in the sand, and stared out of ancient eyes that looked dim and foul, like pools with scum on them. Finally he mumbled something.

"What's he saying?" asked Quade, and I translated:

"Death sits waiting in a cavern. . . ."

The old bat had waited for me to pass this along. And now he added something on his own hook. "This other *effendi*," he said, turning his dim gaze on me, "shall be witness, and will know that I have not lied."

QUADE's grin faded into a frown of intense interest, and he leaned forward to look at the sand on the tray. It was all smoothed out, under those dirty claws, and in the middle was a little hole. Funny that it should look so deep and dark, that hole; there wasn't more than a handful of sand, yet you'd think the diviner had made a pit miles deep.

I saw that Quade was suddenly repelled, and I gave the old vulture a piece of silver, a shilling I think. He bowed and blessed us, and gathered up his tray of sand and scrabbled out. Quade drank some coffee.

"I say, that was nasty," he mumbled to me. "Let's go back to the hotel, eh?"

So we went. But he found it was close and hot there, and stepped out to take a bit of a stroll by himself. Back he came

in half an hour, and he looked quite drawn and stuffy.

"These swine are pulling my leg," he said angrily, and then he told me what had happened. Down in some narrow alley full of shops and booths, he had come upon another fortune-teller, a baggy old woman who spoke English. Probably he hoped to hear something conventional about a blond wife and a journey across deep water, to take the taste of the other prophecy out of his mouth. So he stuck out his palm for her to read.

"And I swear, Stoll," he told me, "that she gave one look and then screwed up her face, and said the same thing."

"What same thing?" I asked him.

"What that filthy old Johnny with the sand said. 'Look out for the cavern,' or 'Death waits in the cavern,' or the like. See here, I jolly well don't like it."

I advised him to keep his chin up and not bother about natives. Finally he managed to make light of the business, but not very convincingly. And when we got to Cairo—Thompson had to stop there for a big row with the officials—he gave the business a third try.

It was in a cool, conventional little tea garden—run by a smart Scotswoman, who knew how a place like that would catch homesick English travelers. She had native waiters dressed like Europeans, and crumpets and all that, and a very lovely girl in a stagy gipsy costume to read the leaves in the cups. Quade wanted to test fate again.

The girl came to our table when he beckoned, and she was plainly intrigued by his grin and his curls and his youth. I think she intended to give him such a reading as would fetch him back later—maybe not for tea alone. But as she turned the cup and squinted at the tangle inside, her handsome face grew grave, and its olive faded to a parchment tint.

"You must take care," she said husk-

ily, in accented English. "Take care of the cave—the cavern." Her eyes grew wider, and she looked at me with them. "You, sir, will see a terrible fate that is his. . . ."

That night Quade packed his bags, and told Thomson and me that he was chucking his job.

"I'm not having any of that cavern," he said. "Three warnings are quite enough."

"What cavern?" I demanded, smiling a little.

"Cavern or underground tomb, what's the difference?"

"You can't take such prophecies seriously," put in Thomson.

Quade replied, very tritely, that there were more things in heaven and earth, and so on. "I know you chaps think I'm afraid," he added.

"Neither of us said anything like that," I replied at once.

"And no more am I afraid," he almost snapped back. "I'll stay in Africa—but in the open. Call me idiotic, or superstitious, or what you will. Better safe than sorry, is my motto."

He was as good as his word for ten years, and he thrived enormously on African danger.

Today he is a tradition, a legend even. Everybody has heard about how, in Jo'burg, he walked up on a mad Kaffir with a gun, who had even those tough Transvaal police buffaloes for the moment; the Kaffir fired twice, stirring Quade's curls with both shots, and then Quade knocked him loose from the gun with one straight dunt on the mouth. Some sort of foundation wanted to give him a medal, but he wouldn't accept. He went instead with some romantic Frenchmen who tried to find the Dying-place of the Elephants—sure, people still look for it; I, for one, believe it exists. But all Quade got was a terrible dose of

black-water fever. He recovered from that and complications, though eleven men out of twelve would have died.

Next he got up into West Central, and visited the Lavalli-valli. Instead of thinking that he was a missionary and eating him, they thought he was a god and worshipped him. I understand that Quade had to fight one skeptic, a big brute about seven feet tall, very skilful with the stabbing-spear. But Quade dodged the first thrust, got in close and took the spear away, and gave it back right through the fellow's lungs. That made him solidier than teak with the Lavalli-valli, who love a fighter better than anything else in all the cosmos. Quade might have ruled there forever, but all he wanted was to trade for the native rubber they had. He got a whole caravan-load, and lost it to Portuguese gamblers in Benguela. Broke, he accepted an offer to help the inland Boer settlers fight off a Gangella uprising. He had more escapes than Bonnie Prince Charlie.

Then he went to Ethiopia, just as the Italians pushed in. Quade took up for Haile Selassie, who dubbed him "Ras Quedu" and put him in command of a kind of a suicide division. His men—Africa's tallest and finest, as I hear—were slaughtered almost to the last one, in the fighting around Jijiga. But Quade was captured by some of Mussolini's Moslem auxiliaries. While the chiefs were arguing whether he should die as an infidel or live as a prisoner of war, Quade throttled a sentry and escaped. He fled clear through the interior, safe into British territory.

That and a thousand other things made him news. Lowell Thomas began talking about him on the radio, and W. B. Seabrook or somebody of that sort wrote a biography, *Quade the Incredible*. I daresay he'll be a solar myth before the century is out.

I CUT his trail just about a year ago, on the fringe of a rain-forest somewhere in the 'tween-mountain country of Portuguese West. If we had a map I'd show you where. His boys and mine entered a little village from opposite sides. I, following in, heard, "Hullo there, Stoll! This *is* a lark!", and there was Quade. Not the curly golden boy any more, but a tough-tempered, lean-cheeked hunter. He had grown a short beard, into which the toothbrush mustache had lengthened and blended. His rosy face had been baked brown, and his was the ready way of moving and standing that comes from harsh life gladly met. The one thing that made me remember the old Swithin Quade—or, rather, the young Swithin Quade—was his bright blue eye, as happy and honest under his worn slouch hat as it had been that first afternoon in Alexandria.

When we had crushed each other's hands and slapped each other's backs almost purple, we quartered our outfits side by side, just at the gate of the village stockade. Then we went together to buy beans and manioc, and he invited me to supper at his fire. After eating we swapped yarns, and of course Quade's yarns were by far the best.

"You still remember those Alexandrian fortunes?" I asked at length.

He smiled, but nodded, and said that he had more than remembered. He had asked fortunes from varied seers—Kaffir witch-doctors, Moslem marabouts, and ordinary crystal-gazers in Cape Town and Durban. "And they've been strangely unanimous," he summed up. "I give you my word, that again and again there's been something about a cave, or a cavern, or just a hole. And I'm always told that I'd best stay out."

"And have you stayed out?" I prompted.

"I have that," he chuckled. "I must

say that, if death waits for me in a cavern, it has remained there. Mine's the traditional charmed life."

"Don't forget," I reminded, "that I'm supposed to witness your fate in a cavern."

"I haven't forgotten, Stoll. But I'm here to hunt—hippopotami just now, I've been too busy all these years to get one—and if you come along tomorrow, we'll take care to stay clear of holes. Then, when we separate in a day or so, I'll be safe again, what?"

I joined in chuckling over the conceit.

But he was dead serious on one point—staying in the open. That night he slept in a tent, not the snug hut that the solicitous villagers had built especially for him. His gun-bearer told my headman that Quade always slept that way; that, when in the settlements, he, Quade, never sat in a house without the windows open, and had twice refused to take a job in the diamond country for dislike of entering a mine. I heard all this at breakfast in the morning, and made bold to ask Quade about it when he came over to renew his invitation to the hunt.

"My bearer's a gossipy chap, but he's telling the truth," Quade confessed cheerfully. "I go into precious few houses except when it's necessary, and into no cellars whatever. Now then, what heavy rifles have you? . . . Oh, I see, Dutch guns. Two nice weapons, those. Well, shall we start?"

Away we went, with our gun-bearers and a leash of villagers for guides. Down valley from the camp we approached a great tangled belt of the forest, and one of the local hunters pointed to a tunnel-like opening among the trees and bushes, the "hole in the jungle" made by nothing but a hippo.

"I say, that looks as if it might be the cavern you and I heard about once," said Quade, and not in a joking manner.

He hesitated, but only for a moment, and then led the way in.

We traversed the leafy passage, and I felt as jumpy as Quade. But the closest approach to danger along the entire way was an ineffably beautiful little snake, that struck at a village boy and missed. My bearer killed it with a stick he carried.

At the other end of the tunnel we came out on the banks of one of those African rivers unknown and uncharted — deep, swift, tree-walled, as dark and exotic as the one in the poem about Kubla Khan. As a matter of fact, Quade muttered a phrase from that very poem about "Alph, the sacred river," but I refrained from adding the bit about "caverns measureless to man." Meanwhile, the villagers poked into a clump of sappy-leaved bushes, and drew into view a brace of dugouts, very nicely finished and perfectly balanced. Quade and his bearer got into one of them, and I with my bearer took the other. Each of us had a pair of villagers to paddle. Together we dropped downstream.

It was I, a little ahead of Quade, who saw the hippo first.

He was floating like a water-soaked log in a little bay where the current slowed down considerably. His nostril bumps were in sight, and his ears pricked up to show that they heard us, but he kept perfectly still, hoping we'd pass him by.

My bearer snapped his fingers backward to attract Quade's attention in the rear boat, and I, sitting in the bow, set my elbow on my knee and aimed for what I could see of the hippo's narrow, flat cranium. He was no farther away than the door yonder—I couldn't miss. And I was using a three-ounce explosive slug, big and heavy enough to go through a brick wall.

I couldn't miss, I say. But I did miss.

No, not quite; I must have nicked an ear or grazed an eyebrow. For next instant the hippo, stung and furious, swung round in the water like a trout, and charged.

He didn't charge me. He didn't even notice me, then or later. He tore past me in the water—perhaps it was shallow enough for him to run on the bottom—straight at Quade's boat.

I heard Quade curse in Umbundu, and his express rifle roared. Whatever the bullet did, it was not enough to stop the hippo. I, snatching my second rifle from my bearer, saw the great lump of a head dip down under the keel of Quade's boat. The hippo tossed, as a bull might toss, and the canoe with its four passengers whirled lightly upward in the air. I've seen an empty bottle tossed like that, by a careless drunkard.

The three natives, shrieking horribly, flew in all directions and splashed into the water. Quade must have been braced or otherwise held in position at the bow, for when the boat came down he was still in it. There was a great upward torrent of water, and through it I saw the bottom of the stricken canoe. The hippo, close in, bit a piece out of one thwart, as a boy nibbles ginger-cake. I had my second gun and was aiming. This time I wouldn't miss; but before I could touch trigger, Quade came to the surface, right in the way of my shot.

"Down! Down!" I yelled at him, and he turned his face toward me, as if mildly curious at my agitation. And then the hippo had him, in a single champing clutch of those great steam-shovel jaws. Quade screamed once, and I saw him shaken like an old glove by a bulldog.

I fired, and the hippo sank on the instant. He took Quade with him. The ripples were purple with blood—Quade's or the beast's. And we got for shore and

safety. Later we tried to recover Quade's body, but we never did.

* * * * *

STOLL was silent, and sipped wine to show that his story was finished.

"But the cavern," I protested. "What

about the cavern, where death was waiting for him?"

Stoll lifted his eyebrows, as a Frenchman might shrug his shoulders.

"Did you ever see a hippopotamus open its mouth—wide?"

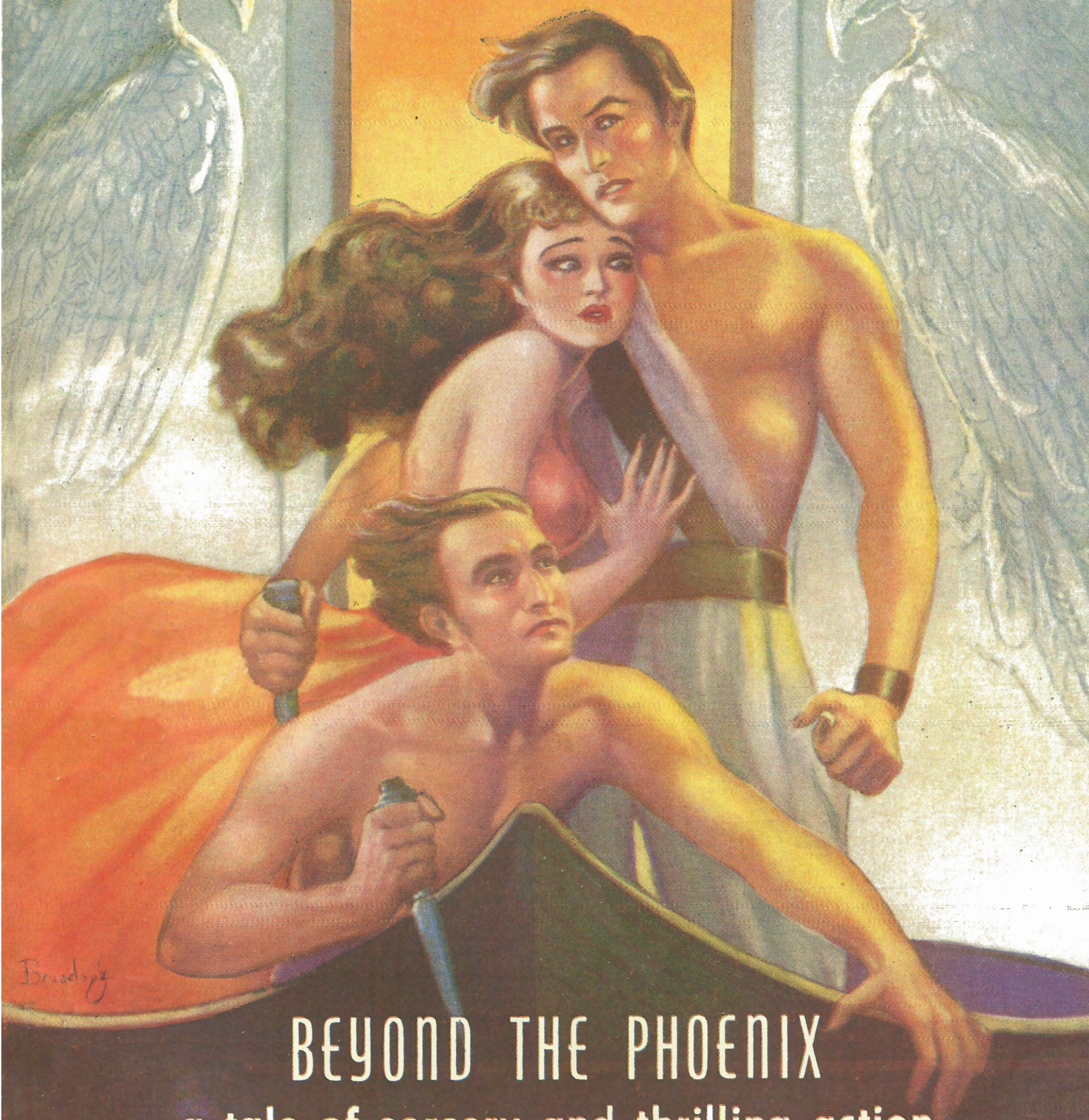


16th Year of Publication

Weird Tales

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BEYOND THE PHOENIX

a tale of sorcery and thrilling action

By HENRY KUTTNER

CLARK ASHTON SMITH

SEABURY QUINN

Up Under the Roof

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

A tale of fear

WHEN I was twelve years old I lived in a shabby old two-story house, built square below and double-gabled above. The four gables contained an upstairs room apiece, each facing a different direction and the entire four making a cross, with a hall and stairwell at the center. The front and side rooms were ceiled and plastered and kalsomined, for bedrooms, but the unfinished rear one held only trunks, boxes and broken furniture. This part of the house was hot and dusty, and open right up to the peak of its gable. Directly above its doorway to the central hall gaped an empty dark triangle, leading into the slant-sided cave above the bedroom ceilings. This lumber-room was called the garret, though it was not a real garret. The real garret was that dark space, up under the roof.

I was the youngest person in the house by more than a decade, and my youth offended everyone bitterly. I was constantly reminded of my childish stupidity and inexperience. Nobody felt that years would mend me, and in time I grew to share that opinion. I tried never to make a statement or venture an opinion that had not been voiced previously by one of my elders. Even at that, I came in for plenty of snubs and corrections, and learned to withdraw into myself. The downstairs parlor was full of books, and I read in them a great deal, including nearly all of an old *Encyclopedia Britannica*. This taste for reading attracted some curious attention on the part of my guardians; occasionally one of them

would suggest to the others that I might be trained for the law or the ministry. Never was I consulted as to my own ambition, which would have shocked the household. I wanted to be a deep-sea diver.

The summer was a hot one, and my room—in the gable on the right or northern side—had only one window. The sun's rays fell directly on the sloping walls, which were only the gable's pitches plastered in, affording little insulation. I slept poorly, bothered by strange and vivid dreams. Sometimes I started awake, itching nervously at armpits and groins, hearing every rustle of the cottonwoods outside and the creakings of the house timbers.

After a while, I am not sure exactly when, I began to hear something else.

Awareness of that sound grew upon me, first slowly and faintly, then with terrifying clarity, over a number of hot, wakeful nights. It was something up above, between the roof-peak and the ceiling, something big and clumsy and stealthy. I remember telling myself once that it was a rat, but the moment the thought came into my head I knew it for a silly lie. Rats skip and scamper, they are light and sure. This was huge and weighty, of a bulk that I judged was far more than my own; and it moved, I say, with a slow, unsure stealth that had sustained rhythm of a sort. It did not drag or walk, but it moved. Years afterward I saw through a microscope the plodding of an ameba. The thing up under the roof sounded as an ameba looks—a mass

stretching out a thin, loose portion of itself, then rolling and flowing all of its substance into that portion, and so creeping along. Only it must have been many, many thousands of times larger than an ameba.

Before long I was hearing the noise every night. I would wait for it, lying awake until it humped itself across the ceiling above me. Always with it came fear, fear that did not diminish with time. I would stare in the dark, my tongue would dry up between my teeth, and my fingertips would tingle as though they had been rubbed sore. On my back would sprout and fan and winnow little involuntary wings of chill, making my spine shrink and quiver as though ice mingled with the marrow. The ceiling, I knew, would descend some night upon me like a great millstone, then crumble about my bed. Something huge and soft would wriggle free of the broken bits and sprawl upon me.

There could be no talking about the business, I well knew. Long before, I had learned that nobody would listen or care. As I have said, I was resented by the other dwellers in that house. Once, when a neighbor boy of fifteen gave me a terrible beating in the front yard, everyone watched from our front windows, but none stirred to help me, not even when I thought I would fall dead at my enemy's scornful feet. When, tired of pulping my face with his knuckles, he turned away at last, I dragged myself in and was tongue-lashed on all sides for an hour. Today I cannot remember exactly what was urged against me, but the tears I had not shed for pain welled forth under the scolding. Things like that made me hesitate about asking for help. One morning I did inquire at breakfast if the others had heard anything strange; but I was only reprimanded for interrupting a discussion of local politics.

THAT night the noise was louder and more terrifying than ever. It began above some other room, and then it trundled along my ceiling, slower and still slower until it paused just over my bed. It seemed to me at that moment that the lath and plaster were no tighter or stronger than a spider-web, and that the entity was incalculably more awful than the prince and father of all spiders. It crouched there, almost within reach of me, gloating and hungering, turning over in its dark mind the problem of when and how to take hold of me.

I could not have stirred from my bed, could not have cried out even.

The thing and its fear were with me always, night after night and week after week, until a day past the middle of the summer, a dark and rainy day when it did not wait for nightfall.

I was alone in the house, tired of hearing the rain and the swish of wet leaves outside. I had exhausted the books in the parlor, and remembered a stack of illustrated magazines, very old, in the lumber-room. I climbed the stairs. The lumber-room was unthinkable ugly and close, with a sort of brown light reflected by the unpainted joists and the insides of the shingles. I found the magazines and began to paw through them.

All had been silent, except for the rain outside. But, in the midst of my searchings, there came a *bump-bump* from overhead, from the opening that led above the ceilings. Something sly and heavy was there, looking down upon me.

But in one scrambling moment I had fled downstairs and to the front door.

It was no swelling of courage that made me pause before rushing out—only a sensible, if hopeless, consideration of what must follow. I could leave the house and mope in the rainy street until someone came back. Then I would have to

come back, too, and in time I would have to go to bed. Then the creature that made the noise would come down; it would wait no longer, for it had seen me and my tortured terror. It would flow to the floor, through my door and creep into bed with me. I would know how it looked, what color it was, and what it wanted with me.

A cold determination came, I know not whence, stiffening my limbs and neck like new sawdust poured into an empty doll. I walked slowly back through the house to the foot of the stairs. There I paused, trying to lift myself to the bottom step. I could not, and turned and walked to the back porch. There, upon the wood-box, lay a hand-ax. It was dull and rusty, and wobbled upon its helve, but I took it and this time I mounted the steps—slowly—one after another, with long, tight breaths between. The old boards creaked under my feet, as if aghast at my foolish daring. I reached the upper hall, and went back into the lumber-room.

It had turned darker than when I had first come to find the magazines. I made myself look up at the triangular opening, and that took a mustering of all my will-power, but there was nothing to see. I stuck the handle of the ax into the waistband of my knickerbockers, and dragged a heavy, dust-laden old bureau over against the wall by the door. On that I placed a broken chair; then a candle-box, precariously on end. At last I climbed up on the bureau, up on the chair, up on the box. My chin came level with the threshold of the black cavern. It was like gazing into a pool of ink. I got hold of a cross-timber and drew myself slowly up. The candle-box tipped over and fell from beneath my feet, striking the floor of the

lumber-room with a crash like an explosion. But next moment I had dragged myself up inside the loft. The roof-peak was so low above my head that I could barely rise to my knees.

I pulled out the ax and tried to hold it in my mouth, like a pirate's dirk. But it was too big and heavy, so I kept it in my right hand. Then, on my knees and my left hand, I went forward on top of the rafters. Every inch took me deeper into darkness, and when I reached and crept past a big rough chimney I might as well have been in a coal mine.

First I went straight to the front of the house. I felt all along the wall, and into the corners. Then I dragged myself around. I could see the light at the far end, partly obstructed by the chimney. Crawling back, I explored gropingly the space above the south bedroom. Last of all I drove myself into the chamber above my own room, where I had always heard the sounds.

I found nothing.

I always finished with those three words when, grown up enough to be listened to, I told this story in after years. But I knew then, and I know now, that there was something, or that there had been something. Until I drove myself to face it, that something had been a mortal peril. Had I done anything else, it would have come looking for me. What would have followed, I am sure nobody can think.

But from that time forward there was not the slightest murmur of noise up under the roof. I grew to sleep so soundly that I had to be shaken in the mornings. Nor did I ever know fear again, not even in the war.



Weird Tales

Strange and fascinating fiction

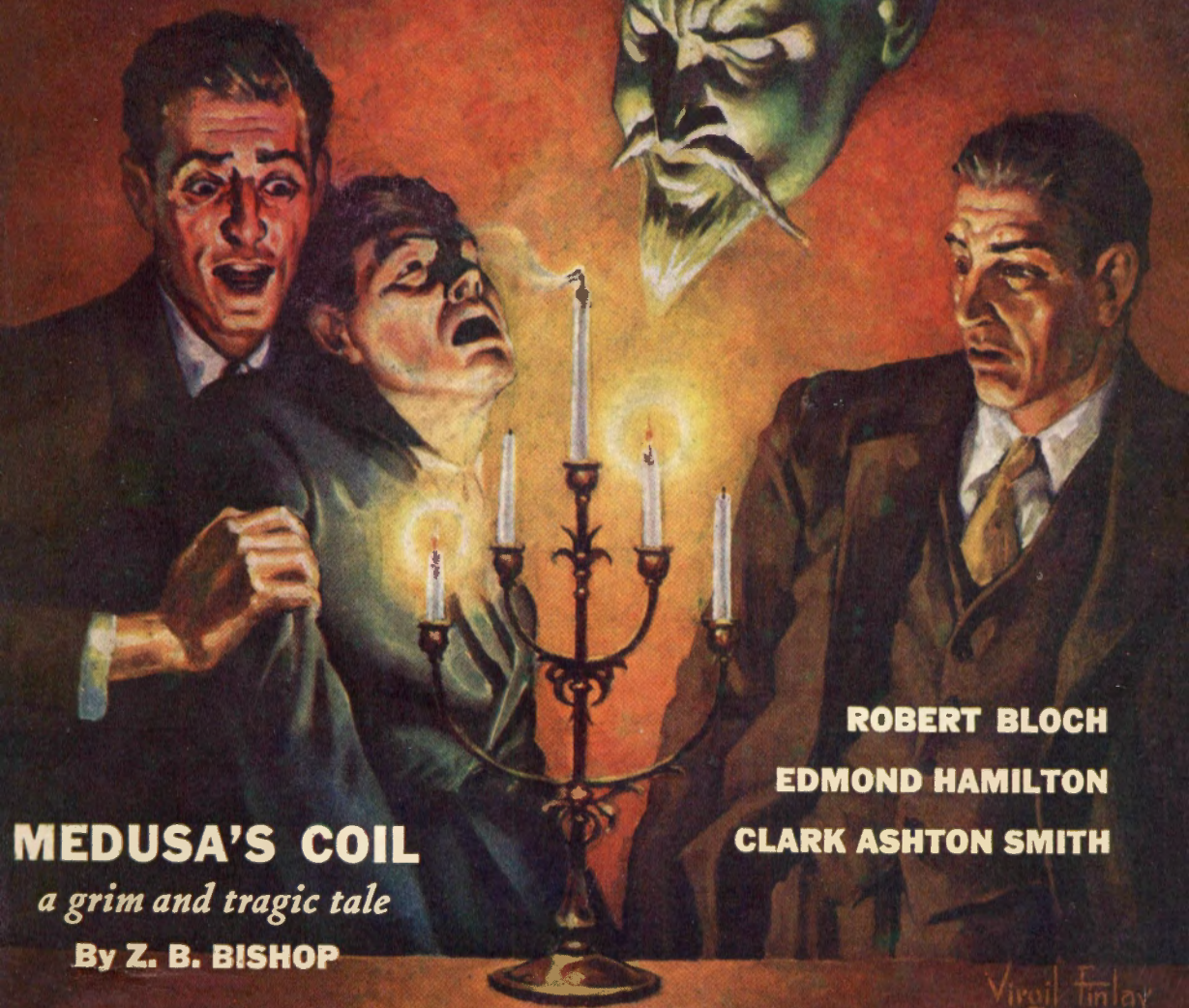
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JANUARY

THE FIFTH CANDLE

the story of a weird curse

By CYRIL MAND



ROBERT BLOCH

EDMOND HAMILTON

CLARK ASHTON SMITH

MEDUSA'S COIL

a grim and tragic tale

By Z. B. BISHOP

Virgil Finlay

These Doth the Lord Hate

By GANS T. FIELD

A weird fragment from the Dark Ages

BEFORE me lies open E. A. Ashwin's translation of *Compendium Maleficarum*, just as three hundred years ago the original lay open before judges and preachers, a notable source of warning against, and indictment of, witchcraft. And from its pages have risen three folk long dead.

The magic that gives them life is that of imagination, concerning which power Brother Francesco-Maria Guazzo writes with sober learning in the very first chapter of the *Compendium*. Their simple embalming was a lone paragraph, barely a hundred and fifty words in length—one of Guazzo's "various and ample examples, with the sole purpose that men, considering the cunning of witches, might study to live piously and devoutly in the Lord."

Guazzo has written shortly and with reserve, though never dryly; and in 1608, when the *Compendium* was first printed under patronage of Cardinal Orazio Maffei, his style was adequate. James I of England still shuddered over the memory of Dr. Fian's conspiracy with Satan to destroy him. In Bredbur, near Cologne, lived a dozen or more aging men who horrifiedly had seen a captured wolf turn back into their neighbor, the damnable Peter Stumpf. Gilles Grenier, prisoned in a Franciscan friary at Bordeaux, would cheerfully tell any visitor his adventures as a devil-gifted warlock, shape-

shifter and cannibal. But times and beliefs have changed. Since Guazzo himself foresaw that his book might provoke "the idle jests of the censorious," let his shade not vex me if I embroider his brief, plain citation.

The phenomenon occurred near Treves, upon the goodly river Moselle, immediately east of the present Franco-German border. Some know Treves, ancient and pleasant, with the cathedral where is preserved a coat of Jesus Christ to call forth the world's wonder and worship. Around the town, now as in Guazzo's time, are pleasant fields and gardens. The scene we are to consider, though unfolding upon land properly German, is more than a trifle French.

In the district of Treves, writes Guazzo and translates Ashwin, a peasant was planting cabbages with his eight-year-old daughter. . . .

Frenchmen hold cabbages in notable esteem and affection—a favorite love-name, throughout the provinces and environs of France, is "cabbage." Without good store of this vegetable, no Moselle farm would be perfect, and certainly no Moselle stew. The peasant was planting, and so it was spring, a fair day with the sky clear and bright, as we shall observe. Our man of the soil comes readily to life before us, stooping and delving at the fresh, good-smelling furrow. He seems a sturdy

fellow, sharp-featured like a Gaul, blond-bearded like a Teuton. His widely spread feet are encased in wooden shoes, he wears a loose, drab frock and a shapeless cap. For all the distance of years, he is amazingly like a peasant cabbage-grower of today.

And beside him, as we have read, works his daughter. Eight years old—is that not young to be a gardener? Yet she is vigorous and intelligent and willing beyond her years. The trowel and seedbag seem to do their own duty in her small, quick hands. Her father is deeply impressed. He, continues the commentator: . . . *praised the girl highly for the work. The young maid, whose sex and age combined to make her talkative, boasted that she could do more wonderful things than that; and when her father asked what they were.*

It is well worth another full stop to consider that complete picture—one of rustic endeavor, not too heavy or too distasteful, especially when the gardeners are so bound together in mutual understanding and affection. Seed-sowers of today can understand Father's pride in his industrious daughter. "How well you dig, my little cabbage!" And his eyes crinkle up in his good-natured brown face as he enjoys his own play upon words. He doubts honestly if there was ever such a good child. She is a true daughter of her mother, and here he turns to glance over his shoulder at the house above the garden—small but snug and well repaired, with an ample gush of smoke from the chimney hole.

His wife is evidently concocting the noonday meal. Something more than bread and soup, he warrants—he is mystified at the plenty of good things she provides, as if she got it by enchantment.

I WILL grant that the picture is too bright, too cheerful; were it fiction, we might borrow from Edgar Allan Poe the device of a black cloud dimming the sky. But perhaps the contrast will be the greater with things as they are.

The excellent child finds the more savor in Father's commendation because she knows that well she deserves it. Nor is she backward in telling him that planting cabbages is not her lone virtue and study. Other of her talents may please and benefit him.

Again Guazzo: . . . *she said, "Go away a little, and I will quickly make it rain on whatever part of the garden you wish."*

And Father? It takes no further effort of the mind's eye to see that peasant visage broaden and the beard stir in a great grin. This daughter of his never fails to warm his heart. Surely she must have heard him say that rain would be welcome in this planting season. As she grows older, she will hear from the priest that only God almighty can send rain. But her pretense is innocent—today let her have her fun, play a game to make them both laugh. Guazzo calls the good man astonished, but more probably he achieves an elaborate burlesque of surprises as he says: "*Come, then, I will go a little away.*"

Jovially he tramps off, fifty paces or so, taking care not to tread on the freshly seeded cabbage-rows. He and his daughter have gone far ahead of their intentions this morning; there can be a minute or two of rest and sport. He pauses and turns.

Now, for the first time, perhaps he scowls.

The child has caught up a gnarled stick and is beating up a froth of mud in a shallow trench. She is speaking, too, or saying a litany. He can catch

only the rhythmic sound of her voice, no words.

... and behold there fell from the clouds a sudden rain upon the said place.

"From the clouds"—whence came those clouds so suddenly? And now this deluge; from his point apart, the cabbage-farmer stares. His shoulders hunch in his loose smock, as though they supported a sudden heavy weight. His sabots dig into the earth. One square-fingered hand steals upward to sign the cross upon his thick chest.

And over yonder falls a rain such as no Christian cares to see, heavy and narrow. It is a shimmery, drenching column of down-darting water, no thicker than a round tower of the baron's castle at Treves, but tall as infinity. He can hear it, too, a drumming rattle on the thirsty clods, like the patterned dance-gambols of many light impious hoofs.

HE CROSSED himself again, and the rain is over, as abruptly and completely as it began. Now is the time for him to inquire in his heart if indeed he saw and heard rightly.

He knows that he did. The rain is gone, but there remains a circular patch of earth all churned to mud; and here comes trotting his daughter, smiling and triumphant, and her garments are drenched. Her eyes sparkle; so sparkled the eyes of her mother, no later than last Sunday, when a roast of pig came to the rough table, as if from nowhere. The hungry husband did not ask about it then; now the question burns him—whence came that meat?

All this detail is romance, a careless padding of Guazzo's narrative, which is much shorter and balder:

The astounded father asked: "Who taught you to do this?" She answered:

"My mother did; and she is very clever at this and other things like it."

We may assure ourselves that there will be no more cabbage-planting this day. The peasant nods dumbly, and plucks at the hem of his smock. Then he clears his throat and says that the sun is high, and that the midday meal is undoubtedly ready.

Together they go to the hut above the garden—the man's sabots thudding heavily and lifelessly, the child's bare feet skipping and dancing. A hearty, rosy-checked woman greets them loudly at the door. To be sure, dinner is ready; but he who suggested a stoppage of work to eat, he finds himself unable to swallow a crumb.

Finally he rises, lurches rather than walks from the door. Near by is a secluded spot; we can readily visualize it as a clump of bushy young trees beside a narrow creek. Into that hiding plunges the peasant. Screened by the trunks and branches, he sinks wretchedly to his knees. He feels that this is not enough of humility. His face droops, his shoulders go slack, and a moment later he lies prostrate upon the shadowed mold of last year's leaves.

There he prays, for an hour and an hour. Sometimes he finds words to say, oftener he achieves only moans and unaccustomed tears.

Can he not be forgiven for having merciful doubts as to his duty in this case? Even the Savior once pleaded that a bitter cup be withheld from His lips. But the peasant makes shift to rise at last. His face is set as firmly as the carved granite of a saint on the cathedral's doorway, yonder in Treves. True, his hands tremble a little, as Abraham's hands must have trembled as they lifted to sacrifice Isaac at God's command; but the final answer has

come into his heart, and he knows what to do.

Here is that answer, as Guazzo gives it:

The peasant nobly faced his right and plain duty; so a few days later, on the pretense that he had been invited to a wedding, he took his wife and daughter dressed in festal wedding robes to the neighboring town, where he handed them over to the Judge to be punished for the crime of witchcraft.

It is hard to imagine how the man lived during those intervening "few days." It is impossible to divine what were his arts and powers that he kept a smiling face and calm manner while his heart smoldered like a coal from the smithy.

And the plan of betrayal, that was a shrewd one and worthy of the greatest witchfinder, let alone a peasant. Yet I doubt if he congratulated himself upon it.

They go to the fair town of Treves, all three in holiday gear. Sometimes, on that journey, the little rain-maker must have been weary, and rode perforce on Father's shoulder. Was his arm tighter than usual around her little body?

Did his voice quiver as he answered some question she prattled? I make no doubt of that; but from Guazzo we know what the end of the jaunt turned out to be.

Of a sudden the mother and daughter are in the hands of the judge, under guard of his men-at-arms.

With what fierce scorn does the witch-woman deny the charges—until, after hours of questioning and perhaps a touch of the lash or thumbscrew, she makes confession. True, she is a sorceress. She has signed the Devil's book, attended the Sabbat, sworn the oath of

evil. She has schooled her daughter to the like infamy.

LOOK elsewhere in Guazzo's absorbing *Compendium* for what must have been the rest of the story. Death by fire, he says confidently, is the only right punishment for the dreadful sin of witchcraft. A stake, therefore, is set upright in the market-place of Treves, and heaped about with faggots. To this the witch and her fledgling are borne, high upon the armored shoulders of the law's servants. With the last of her tears, the older culprit pleads and prays that she be allowed to walk. Sternly the judge refuses this request; is it not a commonplace that a witch, going to execution, need but touch toe to earth for her bonds to dissolve and her executioners to fall as if struck by lightning?

That double witch-burning is a rare treat and curiosity in Treves, and it receives the attention it merits. Not a soul in all the district, from the baron of the castle to the beggars whose home and heritage is the gutter, but must draw near to see.

No, that is not strictly true. Not every soul in the district is present at the burning; for a solitary man trudges away, to his empty home by the cabbage garden. His big hands are locked behind him, his chin weighs like lead upon his breast, the lines of his face teem with tears. He dares to utter the supplication refused by the priest at the cathedral—a timid prayer that two spirits even now taking flight, shall not be utterly consumed in hell; O Lord, let them win at last through long punishment and sincere repentance to some measure of comfort in a most humble corner of heaven.

Not all agonies are of the fire.

Weird

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FEBRUARY

DEATH IS AN ELEPHANT

a thrill tale of the circus

By NATHAN HINDIN

THE HOUSE WHERE TIME STOOD STILL

a fascinating Jules de Grandin story

By SEABURY QUINN

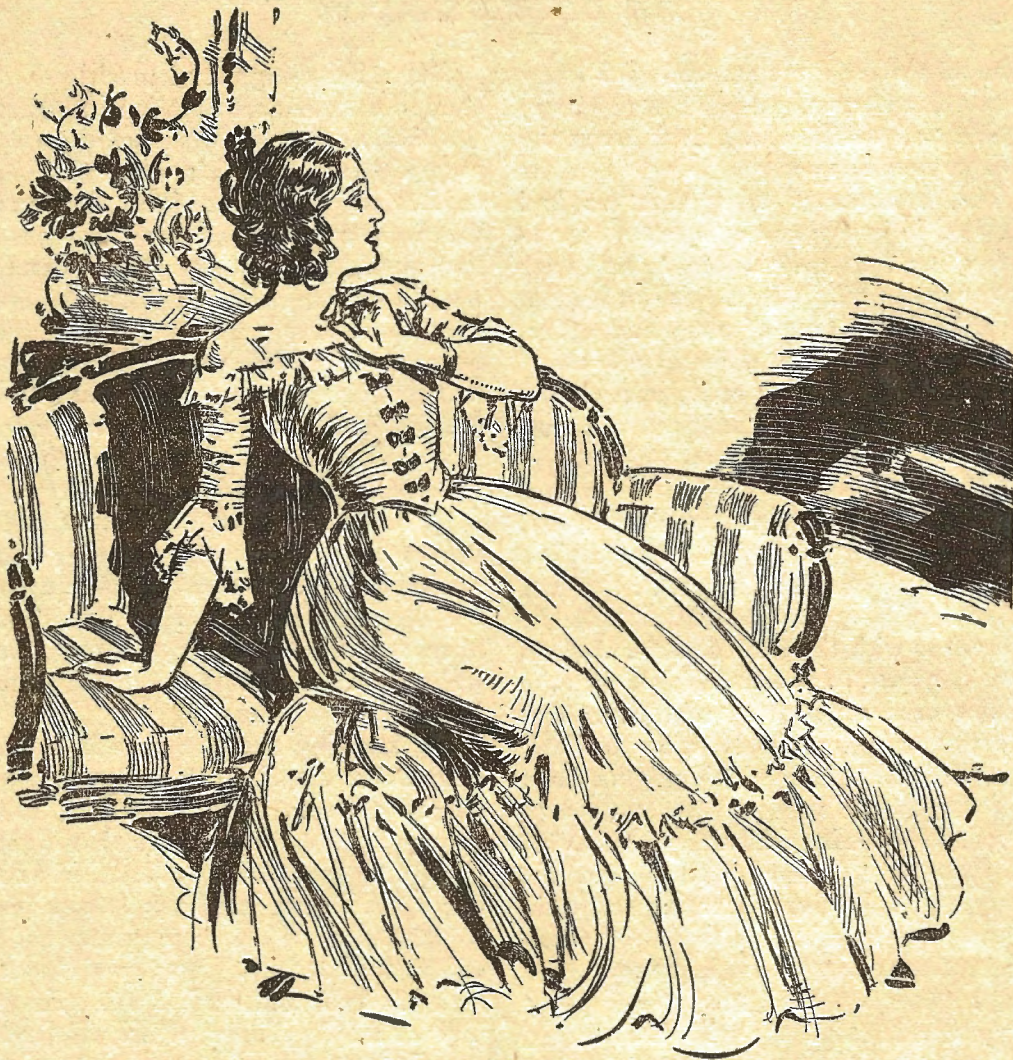
DONALD WANDREI

THOMAS P. KELLEY

CLARK ASHTON SMITH

MANLY WADE WELLMAN





"The swinging object was increasing in her sight."

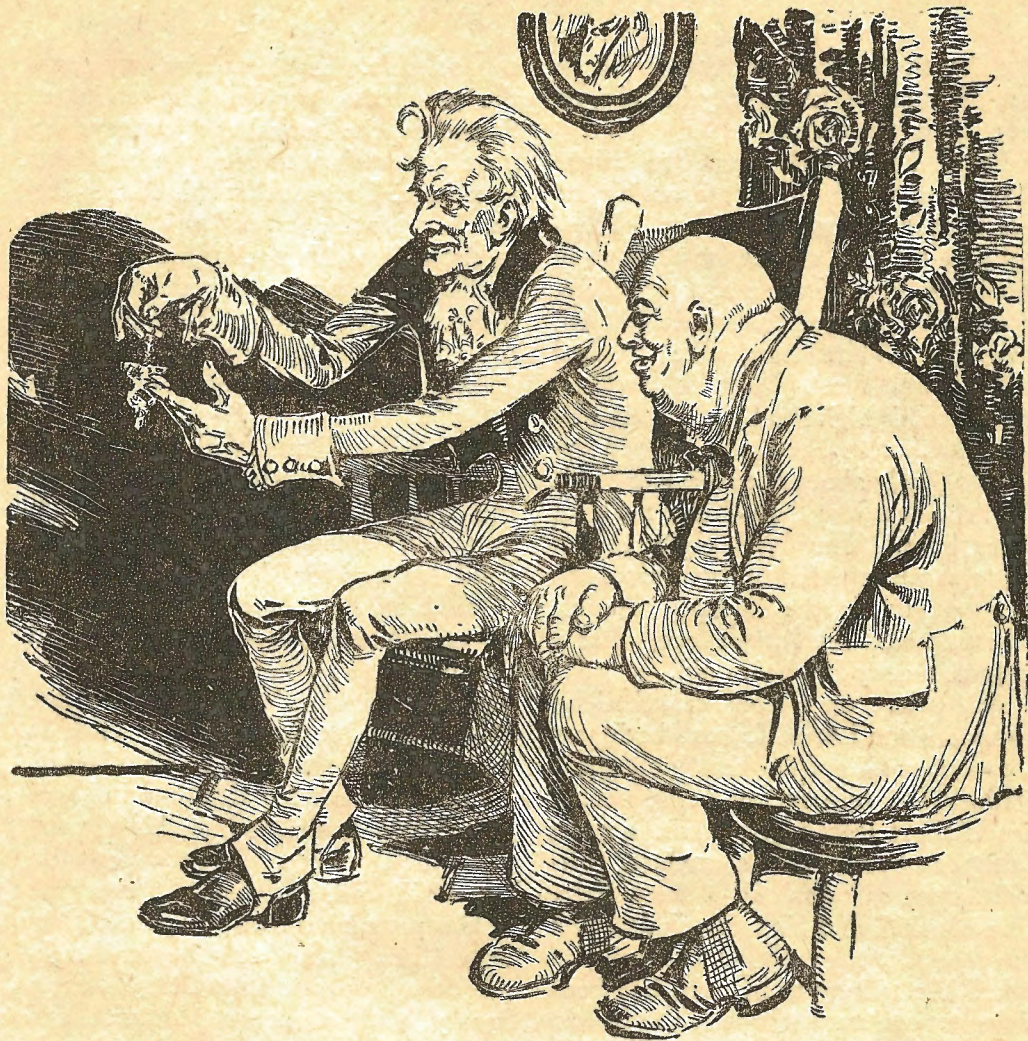
Fearful Rock

1. *The Sacrifice*

ENID MANDIFER tried to stand up under what she had just heard. She managed it, but her ears rang, her eyes misted. She felt as if she were drowning.

The voice of Persil Mandifer came through the fog, level and slow, with the hint of that foreign accent which nobody could identify:

"Now that you know that you are not really my daughter, perhaps you are curious as to why I adopted you."



By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

*An every tale of the American Civil War, and the uncanny evil being who called himself Persil Mandifer, and his lovely daughter—
a tale of dark powers and weird happenings*

Curious . . . was that the word to use? But this man who was not her father after all, he delighted in understatements. Enid's eyes had grown clearer now. She was able to move, to obey Persil Mandifer's invitation to seat herself. She saw him, half sprawl-

ing in, his rocking-chair against the plastered wall of the parlor, under the painting of his ancient friend Aaron Burr. Was the rumor true, she mused, that Burr had not really died, that he still lived and planned ambitiously to make himself a throne in America?

But Aaron Burr would have to be an old, old man—a hundred years old, or more than a hundred.

Persil Mandifer's own age might have been anything, but probably he was nearer seventy than fifty. Physically he was the narrowest of men, in shoulders, hips, temples and legs alike, so that he appeared distorted and compressed. White hair, like combed thistledown, fitted itself in ordered streaks to his high skull. His eyes, dull and dark as musket-balls, peered expressionlessly above the nose like a stilletto, the chin like the pointed toe of a fancy boot. The fleshlessness of his legs was accentuated by tight trousers, strapped under the insteps. At his throat sprouted a frill of lace, after a fashion twenty-five years old.

At his left, on a stool, crouched his enormous son Larue. Larue's body was a collection of soft-looking globes and bladders—a tremendous belly, round-kneed short legs, puffy hands, a gross bald head between fat shoulders. His white linen suit was only a shade paler than his skin, and his loose, faded-pink lips moved incessantly. Once Enid had heard him talking to himself, had been close enough to distinguish the words. Over and over he had said: "I'll kill you. I'll kill you. I'll kill you."

These two men had reared her from babyhood, here in this low, spacious manor of brick and timber in the Ozark country. Sixteen or eighteen years ago there had been Indians hereabouts, but they were gone, and the few settlers were on remote farms. The Mandifers dwelt alone with their slaves, who were unusually solemn and taciturn for Negroes.

Persil Mandifer was continuing: "I have brought you up as a gentleman would bring up his real daughter—for the sole and simple end of making her

a good wife. That explains, my dear, the governess, the finishing-school at St. Louis, the books, the journeys we have undertaken to New Orleans and elsewhere. I regret that this distressing war between the states," and he paused to draw from his pocket his enameled snuff-box, "should have made recent junkets impracticable. However, the time has come, and you are not to be despised. Your marriage is now to befall you."

"Marriage," mumbled Larue, in a voice that Enid was barely able to hear. His fingers interlaced, like fat white worms in a jumble. His eyes were for Enid, his ears for his father.

Enid saw that she must respond. She did so: "You have—chosen a husband for me?"

Persil Mandifer's lips crawled into a smile, very wide on his narrow blade of a face, and he took a pinch of snuff. "Your husband, my dear, was chosen before ever you came into this world," he replied. The smile grew broader, but Enid did not think it cheerful. "Does your mirror do you justice?" he teased her. "Enid, my foster-daughter, does it tell you truly that you are a beauty, with a face all lustrous and oval, eyes full of tender fire, a cascade of golden-brown curls to frame the whole?" His gaze wandered upon her body, and his eyelids drooped. "Does it convince you, Enid, that your figure combines rarely those traits of fragility and rondure that are never so desirable as when they occur together? Ah, Enid, had I myself met you, or one like you, thirty years ago——"

"Father!" growled Larue, as though at sacrilege. Persil Mandifer chuckled. His left hand, white and slender with a dark cameo upon the forefinger, extended and patted Larue's repellent bald pate, in superior affection.

"Never fear, son," crooned Persil Mandifer. "Enid shall go a pure bride to him who waits her." His other hand crept into the breast of his coat and drew forth something on a chain. It looked like a crucifix.

"Tell me," pleaded the girl, "tell me, fa——" She broke off, for she could not call him father. "What is the name of the one I am to marry?"

"His name?" said Larue, as though aghast at her ignorance.

"His name?" repeated the lean man in the rocking-chair. The crucifix-like object in his hands began to swing idly and rhythmically, while he paid out chain to make its pendulum motion wider and slower. "He has no name."

ENID felt her lips grow cold and dry. "He has no——"

"He is the Nameless One," said Persil Mandifer, and she could discern the capital letters in the last two words he spoke.

"Look," said Larue, out of the corner of his weak mouth that was nearest his father. "She thinks that she is getting ready to run."

"She will not run," assured Persil Mandifer. "She will sit and listen, and watch what I have here in my hand." The object on the chain seemed to be growing in size and clarity of outline. Enid felt that it might not be a crucifix, after all.

"The Nameless One is also ageless," continued Persil Mandifer. "My dear, I dislike telling you all about him, and it is not really necessary. All you need know is that we—my fathers and I—have served him here, and in Europe, since the days when France was Gaul. Yes, and before that."

The swinging object really was increasing in her sight. And the basic cross was no cross, but a three-armed

thing like a capital T. Nor was the body-like figure spiked to it; it seemed to twine and clamber upon that T-shape, like a monkey on a bracket. Like a monkey, it was grotesque, disproportionate, a mockery. That climbing creature was made of gold, or of something gilded over. The T-shaped support was as black and bright as jet.

Enid thought that the golden creature was dull, as if tarnished, and that it appeared to move; an effect created, perhaps, by the rhythmic swinging on the chain.

"Our profits from the association have been great," Persil Mandifer droned. "Yet we have given greatly. Four times in each hundred years must a bride be offered."

Mist was gathering once more, in Enid's eyes and brain, a thicker mist than the one that had come from the shock of hearing that she was an adopted orphan. Yet through it all she saw the swinging device, the monkey-like climber upon the T. And through it all she heard Mandifer's voice:

"When my real daughter, the last female of my race, went to the Nameless One, I wondered where our next bride would come from. And so, twenty years ago, I took you from a foundling asylum at Nashville."

It was becoming plausible to her now. There was a power to be worshipped, to be feared, to be fed with young women. She must go—no, this sort of belief was wrong. It had no element of decency in it, it was only beaten into her by the spell of the pendulum-swinging charm. Yet she had heard certain directions, orders as to what to do.

"You will act in the manner I have described, and say the things I have repeated, tonight at sundown," Mandifer informed her, as though from a

great distance. "You will surrender yourself to the Nameless One, as it was ordained when first you came into my possession."

"No," she tried to say, but her lips would not even stir. Something had crept into her, a will not her own, which was forcing her to accept defeat. She knew she must go—where?

"To Fearful Rock," said the voice of Mandifer, as though he had heard and answered the question she had not spoken. "Go there, to that house where once my father lived and worshipped, that house which, upon the occasion of his rather mysterious death, I left. It is now our place of devotion and sacrifice. Go there, Enid, tonight at sundown, in the manner I have prescribed. . . ."

2. *The Cavalry Patrol*

LIEUTENANT KANE LANARK was one of those strange and vicious heritage-anomalies of one of the most paradoxical of wars—a war where a great Virginian was high in Northern command, and a great Pennsylvanian stubbornly defended one of the South's principal strongholds; where the two presidents were both born in Kentucky, indeed within scant miles of each other; where father strove against son, and brother against brother, even more frequently and tragically than in all the jangly verses and fustian dramas of the day.

Lanark's birthplace was a Maryland farm, moderately prosperous. His education had been completed at the Virginia Military Institute, where he was one of a very few who were inspired by a quiet, bearded professor of mathematics who later became the Stonewall of the Confederacy, perhaps the continent's greatest tactician. The older,

Lanark was strongly for state's rights and mildly for slavery, though he possessed no Negro chattels. Kane, the younger of two sons, had carried those same attitudes with him as much as seven miles past the Kansas border, whither he had gone in 1861 to look for employment and adventure.

At that lonely point he met with Southern guerrillas, certain loose-shirted, weapon-laden gentry whose leader, a gaunt young man with large, worried eyes, bore the craggy name of Quantrill and was to be called by a later historian the bloodiest man in American history. Young Kane Lanark, surrounded by sudden leveled guns, protested his sympathy with the South by birth, education and personal preference. Quantrill replied, rather sententiously, that while this might be true, Lanark's horse and money-belt had a Yankee look to them, and would be taken as prisoners of war.

After the guerrillas had galloped away, with a derisive laugh hanging in the air behind them, Lanark trudged back to the border and a little settlement, where he begged a ride by freight wagon to St. Joseph, Missouri. There he enlisted with a Union cavalry regiment just then in the forming, and his starkness of manner, with evidences about him of military education and good sense, caused his fellow recruits to elect him a sergeant.

Late that year, Lanark rode with a patrol through southern Missouri, where fortune brought him and his comrades face to face with Quantrill's guerrillas, the same that had plundered Lanark. The lieutenant in charge of the Federal cavalry set a most hysterical example for flight, and died of six Southern bullets placed accurately between his shoulder blades; but Lanark, as ranking non-commissioned officer,

rallied the others, succeeded in withdrawing them in order before the superior force. As he rode last of the retreat, he had the fierce pleasure of engaging and sabering an over-zealous guerrilla, who had caught up with him. The patrol rejoined its regiment with only two lost, the colonel was pleased to voice congratulations and Sergeant Lanark became Lieutenant Lanark, vice the slain officer.

In April of 1862, General Curtis, recently the victor in the desperately fought battle of Pea Ridge, showed trust and understanding when he gave Lieutenant Lanark a scouting party of twenty picked riders, with orders to seek yet another encounter with the marauding Quantrill. Few Union officers wanted anything to do with Quantrill, but Lanark, remembering his harsh treatment at those avaricious hands, yearned to kill the guerrilla chieftain with his own proper sword. On the afternoon of April fifth, beneath a sun bright but none too warm, the scouting patrol rode down a trail at the bottom of a great, trough-like valley just south of the Missouri-Arkansas border. Two pairs of men, those with the surest-footed mounts, acted as flanking parties high on the opposite slopes, and a watchful corporal by the name of Gogan walked his horse well in advance of the main body. The others rode two and two, with Lanark at the head and Sergeant Jager, heavy-set and morosely keen of eye, at the rear.

A photograph survives of Lieutenant Kane Lanark as he appeared that very spring—his breadth of shoulder and slimness of waist accentuated by the snug blue cavalry jacket that terminated at his sword-belt, his ruddy, beak-nosed face shaded by a wide black hat with a gold cord. He wore a mustache, trim but not gay, and his long

chin alone of all his command went smooth-shaven. To these details he it added that he rode his bay gelding easily, with a light, sure hand on the reins, and that he had the air of one who knew his present business.

The valley opened at length upon a wide level platter of land among high, pine-tufted hills. The flat expanse was no more than half timbered, though clever enemies might advance unseen across it if they exercised caution and foresight enough to slip from one belt of clump of trees to the next. Almost at the center of the level, a good five miles from where Lanark now halted his command stood a single great chimney or finger of rock, its lean tip more than twice the height of the tallest tree within view.

To this geologic curiosity the eyes of Lieutenant Lanark snapped at once.

"Sergeant!" he called, and Jager sidled his horse close.

"We'll head for that rock, and stop there," Lanark announced. "It's a natural watch-tower, and from the top of it we can see everything, even better than we could if we rode clear across flat ground to those hills. And if Quantrill is west of us, which I'm sure he is, I'd like to see him coming a long way off, so as to know whether to fight or run."

"I agree with you, sir," said Jager. He peered through narrow, puffy lids at the pinnacle, and gnawed his shaggy lower lip. "I shall lift up mine eyes unto the rocks, from whence cometh my help," he misquoted reverently. The sergeant was full of garbled Scripture, and the men called him "Bible" Jager behind that wide back of his. This did not mean that he was soft, dreamy or easily fooled; Curtis had chosen him as sagely as he had chosen Lanark.

STAYING in the open as much as possible, the party advanced upon the rock. They found it standing above a soft, grassy hollow, which in turn ran eastward from the base of the rock to a considerable ravine, dark and full of timber. As they spread out to the approach, they found something else; a house stood in the hollow, shadowed by the great pinnacle.

"It looks deserted, sir," volunteered Jager, at Lanark's bridle-elbow. "No sign of life."

"Perhaps," said Lanark. "Deploy the men, and we'll close in from all sides. Then you, with one man, enter the back door. I'll take another and enter the front."

"Good, sir." The sergeant kneeled his horse into a faster walk, passing from one to another of the three corporals with muttered orders. Within sixty seconds the patrol closed upon the house like a twenty-fingered hand. Lanark saw that the building had once been pretentious—two stories, stoutly made of good lumber that must have been carted from a distance, with shuttered windows and a high peaked roof. Now it was a paint-starved gray, with deep veins and tracteries of dirty black upon its clapboards. He dismounted before the piazza with its four pillar-like posts, and threw his reins to a trooper.

"Suggs!" he called, and obediently his own personal orderly, a plump blond youth, dropped out of the saddle. Together they walked up on the resounding planks of the piazza. Lanark, his ungloved right hand swinging free beside his holster, knocked at the heavy front door with his left fist. There was no answer. He tried the knob, and after a moment of shoving, the hinges creaked and the door went open.

They walked into a dark front hall, then into a parlor with dust upon the rug and the fine furniture, and rectangles of pallor upon the walls where pictures had once hung for years. They could hear echoes of their every movement, as anyone will hear in a house to which he is not accustomed. Beyond the parlor, they came to an ornate chandelier with crystal pendants, and at the rear stood a sideboard of dark, hard wood. Its drawers all hung half open, as if the silver and linen had been hastily removed. Above it hung plate-racks, also empty.

Feet sounded in a room to the rear, and then Jager's voice, asking if his lieutenant were inside. Lanark met him in the kitchen, conferred; then together they mounted the stairs in the front hall.

Several musty bedrooms, darkened by closed shutters, occupied the second floor. The beds had dirty mattresses, but no sheets or blankets.

"All clear in the house," pronounced Lanark. "Jager, go and detail a squad to reconnoiter in that little ravine east of here—we want no rebel sharpshooters sneaking up on us from that point. Then leave a picket there, put a man on top of the rock, and guards at the front and rear of this house. And have some of the others police up the house itself. We may stay here for two days, even longer."

The sergeant saluted, then went to bellow his orders, and troopers dashed hither and thither to obey. In a moment the sound of sweeping arose from the parlor. Lanark, to whom it suggested spring cleaning, sneezed at thought of the dust, then gave Suggs directions about the care of his bay. Unbuckling his saber, he hung it upon the saddle, but his revolver he retained. "You're in charge, Jager," he called,

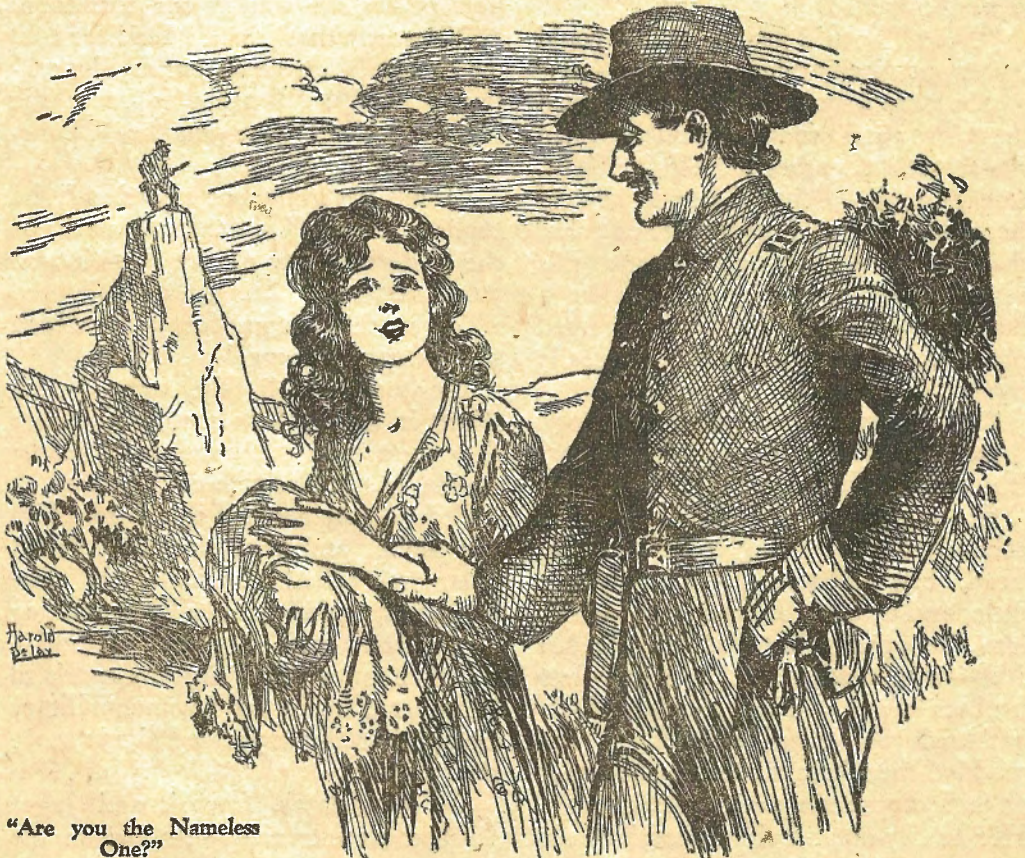
and sauntered away toward the wooded cleft.

His legs needed the exercise; he could feel them straightening by degrees after their long clamping to his saddle-flaps. He was uncomfortably dusty, too, and there must be water at the bottom of the ravine. Walking into the shade of the trees, he heard, or fancied he heard, a trickling sound. The slope was steep here, and he walked fast to maintain an easy balance upon it, for a minute and then two. There was water ahead, all right, for it gleamed through the leafage. And something else gleamed, something pink.

That pinkness was certainly flesh. His right hand dropped quickly to his

revolver-butt, and he moved forward carefully. Stooping, he took advantage of the bushy cover, at the same time avoiding a touch that might snap or rustle the foliage. He could hear a voice now, soft and rhythmic. Lanark frowned. A woman's voice? His right hand still at his weapon, his left caught and carefully drew down a spray of willow. He gazed into an open space beyond.

It was a woman, all right, within twenty yards of him. She stood ankle-deep in a swift, narrow rush of brook-water, and her fine body was nude, every graceful curve of it, with a cascade of golden-brown hair falling and floating about her shoulders. She seemed to be praying, but her eyes were



"Are you the Nameless One?"

not lifted. They stared at a hand-mirror, that she held up to catch the last flash of the setting sun.

3. *The Image in the Cellar*

LANARK, a young, serious-minded bachelor in an era when women swaddled themselves inches deep in fabric, had never seen such a sight before; and to his credit be it said that his first and strongest emotion was proper embarrassment for the girl in the stream. He had a momentary impulse to slip back and away. Then he remembered that he had ordered a patrol to explore this place; it would be here within moments.

Therefore he stepped into the open, wondering at the time, as well as later, if he did well.

"Miss," he said gently. "Miss, you'd better put on your things. Mymen——"

She stared, squeaked in fear, dropped the mirror and stood motionless. Then she seemed to gather herself for flight. Lanark realized that the trees beyond her were thick and might hide enemies, that she was probably a resident of this rebel-inclined region and might be a decoy for such as himself. He whipped out his revolver, holding it at the ready but not pointing it.

"Don't run," he warned her sharply. "Are those your clothes beside you? Put them on at once."

She caught up a dress of flowered calico and fairly flung it on over her head. His embarrassment subsided a little, and he came another pace or two into the open. She was pushing her feet—very small feet they were—into heelless shoes. Her hands quickly gathered up some underthings and wadded them into a bundle. She gazed at him apprehensively, questioningly. Her hastily-donned dress remained un-

fastened at the throat, and he could see the panicky stir of her heart in her half-bared bosom.

"I'm sorry," he went on, "but I think you'd better come up to the house with me."

"House?" she repeated fearfully, and her dark, wide eyes turned to look beyond him. Plainly she knew which house he meant. "You—live there?"

"I'm staying there at this time."

"You—came for me?" Apparently she had expected someone to come.

But instead of answering, he put a question of his own. "To whom were you talking just now? I could hear you."

"I—I said the words. The words my faith——" She broke off, wretchedly, and Lanark was forced to think how pretty she was in her confusion. "The words that Persil Mandifer told me to say." Her eyes on his, she continued softly: "I came to meet the Nameless One. Are you the—Nameless One?"

"I am certainly not nameless," he replied. "I am Lieutenant Lanark, of the Federal Army of the Frontier, at your service." He bowed slightly, which made it more formal. "Now, come along with me."

He took her by the wrist, which shook in his big left hand. Together they went back eastward through the ravine, in the direction of the house.

Before they reached it, she told him her name, and that the big natural pillar was called Fearful Rock. She also assured him that she knew nothing of Quantrill and his guerrillas; and a fourth item of news shook Lanark to his spurred heels, the first non-military matter that had impressed him in more than a year.

An hour later, Lanark and Jager finished an interview with her in the

parlor. They called Suggs, who conducted the young woman up to one of the bedrooms. Then lieutenant and sergeant faced each other. The light was dim, but each saw bafflement and uneasiness in the face of the other.

"Well?" challenged Lanark.

Jager produced a clasp-knife, opened it, and pared thoughtfully at a thumb-nail. "I'll take my oath," he ventured, "that this Miss Enid Mandifer is telling the gospel truth."

"Truth!" exploded Lanark scornfully. "Mountain-folk ignorance, I call it. Nobody believes in those devil-things these days."

"Oh, yes, somebody does," said Jager, mildly but definitely. "I do." He put away his knife and fumbled within his blue army shirt. "Look here, Lieutenant."

It was a small book he held out, little more than a pamphlet in size and thickness. On its cover of gray paper appeared the smudged woodcut of an owl against a full moon, and the title:

John George Hohman's

POW-WOWS

or

LONG LOST FRIEND

"I got it when I was a young lad in Pennsylvania," explained Jager, almost reverently. "Lots of Pennsylvania people carry this book, as I do." He opened the little volume, and read from the back of the title page:

"Whosoever carries this book with him is safe from all his enemies, visible or invisible; and whoever has this book with him cannot die without the holy corpse of Jesus Christ, nor drown in any water nor burn up in any fire, nor can any unjust sentence be passed upon him."

LANARK put out his hand for the book, and Jager surrendered it, somewhat hesitantly. "I've heard of supposed witches in Pennsylvania," said the officer. "Hexes, I believe they're called. Is this a witch book?"

"No, sir. Nothing about black magic. See the cross on that page? It's a protection against witches."

"I thought that only Catholics used the cross," said Lanark.

"No. Not only Catholics."

"Hmm." Lanark passed the thing back. "Superstition, I call it. Nevertheless, you speak this much truth: that girl is in earnest, she believes what she told us. Her father, or stepfather, or whoever he is, sent her up here on some ridiculous errand—perhaps a dangerous one." He paused. "Or I may be misjudging her. It may be a clever scheme, Jager—a scheme to get a spy in among us."

The sergeant's big bearded head wagged negation. "No, sir. If she was telling a lie, it'd be a more believable one, wouldn't it?" He opened his talisman book again. "If the lieutenant please, there's a charm in here, against being shot or stabbed. It might be a good thing, seeing there's a war going on—perhaps the lieutenant would like me to copy it out?"

"No, thanks." Lanark drew forth his own charm against evil and nervousness, a leather case that contained cheroots. Jager, who had convictions against the use of tobacco, turned away disapprovingly as his superior bit off the end of a fragrant brown cylinder and kindled a match.

"Let me look at that what-do-you-call-it book again," he requested, and for a second time Jager passed the little volume over, then saluted and retired.

Darkness was gathering early, what with the position of the house in the

grassy hollow, and the pinnacle of Fearful Rock standing between it and the sinking sun to westward. Lanark called for Suggs to bring a candle, and, when the orderly obeyed, directed him to take some kind of supper upstairs to Enid Mandifer. Left alone, the young officer seated himself in a newly dusted armchair of massive dark wood, emitted a cloud of blue tobacco smoke, and opened the *Long Lost Friend*.

It had no publication date, but John George Hohman, the author, dated his preface from Berks County, Pennsylvania, on July 31, 1819. In the secondary preface filled with testimonials as to the success of Hohman's miraculous cures, was included the pious ejaculation: "The Lord bless the beginning and the end of this little work, and be with us, that we may not misuse it, and thus commit a heavy sin!"

"Amen to that!" said Lanark to himself, quite soberly. Despite his assured remarks to Jager, he was somewhat repelled and nervous because of the things Enid Mandifer had told him.

Was there, then, potentiality for such supernatural evil in this enlightened Nineteenth Century, even in the pages of the book he held? He read further, and came upon a charm to be recited against violence and danger, perhaps the very one Jager had offered to copy for him. It began rather sonorously: "The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with me. Oh shot, stand still! In the name of the mighty prophets Agtion and Elias, and do not kill me. . . ."

Lanark remembered the name of Elias from his boyhood Sunday schooling, but Agtion's identity, as a prophet or otherwise, escaped him. He resolved to ask Jager; and, as though the thought had acted as a summons, Jager

came almost running into the room.

"Lieutenant, sir! Lieutenant!" he said hoarsely.

"Yes, Sergeant Jager?" Lanark rose, stared questioningly, and held out the book. Jager took it automatically, and as automatically stowed it inside his shirt.

"I can prove, sir, that there's a real devil here," he mouthed unsteadily.

"What?" demanded Lanark. "Do you realize what you're saying, man? Explain yourself."

"Come, sir," Jager almost pleaded, and led the way into the kitchen. "It's down in the cellar."

From a little heap on a table he picked up a candle, and then opened a door full of darkness.

The stairs to the cellar were shaky to Lanark's feet, and beneath him was solid black shadow, smelling strongly of damp earth. Jager, stamping heavily ahead, looked back and upward. That broad, bearded face, that had not lost its full-blooded flush in the hottest fighting at Pea Ridge, had grown so pallid as almost to give off sickly light. Lanark began to wonder if all this theatrical approach would not make the promised devil seem ridiculous, anticlimactic—the flutter of an owl, the scamper of a rat, or something of that sort.

"You have the candle, sergeant," he reminded, and the echo of his voice momentarily startled him. "Strike a match, will you?"

"Yes, sir." Jager had raised a knee to tighten his stripe-sided trousers. A snapping scrape, a burst of flame, and the candle glow illuminated them both. It revealed, too, the cellar, walled with stones but floored with clay. As they finished the descent, Lanark could feel the soft grittiness of that clay under his bootsoles. All around them lay

rubbish—boxes, casks, stacks of broken pots and dishes, bundles of kindling.

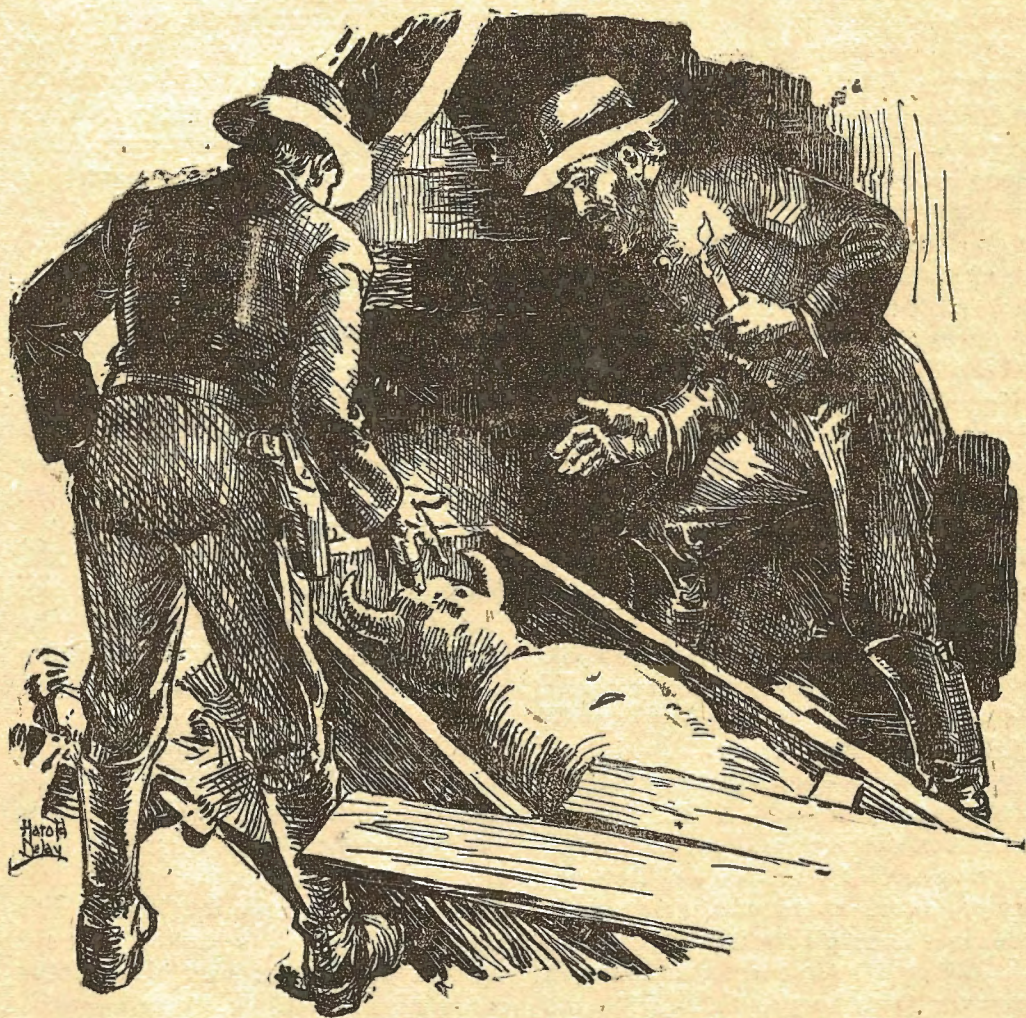
"Here," Jager was saying, "here is what I found."

HE WALKED around the foot of the stairs. Beneath the slope of the flight lay a long, narrow case, made of plain, heavy boards. It was unpainted and appeared ancient. As Jager lowered the light in his hand, Lanark saw that the joinings were secured with huge nails, apparently forged by hand.

Such nails had been used in building the older sheds on his father's Maryland estate. Now there was a creak of wooden protest as Jager pried up the loosened lid of the coffin-like box.

Inside lay something long and ruddy. Lanark saw a head and shoulders, and started violently. Jager spoke again:

"An image, sir. A heathen image." The light made grotesque the sergeant's face, one heavy half fully illumined, the other secret and lost in the black shadow. "Look at it."



"It's Satan's own image," Jager was mouthing deeply.

Lanark, too, stooped for a closer examination. The form was of human length, or rather more; but it was not finished, was neither divided into legs below nor extended into arms at the roughly shaped shoulders. The head, too, had been molded without features, though from either side, where the ears should have been it sprouted up-curved horns like a bison's. Lanark felt a chill creep upon him, whence he knew not.

"It's Satan's own image," Jager was mouthing deeply. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image——"

With one foot he turned the coffin-box upon its side. Lanark took a quick stride backward, just in time to prevent the ruddy form from dropping out upon his toes. A moment later, Jager had spurned the thing. It broke, with a crashing sound like crockery, and two more trampling kicks of the sergeant's heavy boots smashed it to bits.

"Stop!" cried Lanark, too late. "Why did you break it? I wanted to have a good look at the thing."

"But it is not good for men to look upon the devil's works," responded Jager, almost pontifically.

"Don't advise me, sergeant," said Lanark bleakly. "Remember that I am your officer, and that I don't need instruction as to what I may look at." He looked down at the fragments. "Hmm, the thing was hollow, and quite brittle. It seems to have been stuffed with straw—no, excelsior. Wood shavings, anyway." He investigated the fluffy inner mass with a toe: "Hullo, there's something inside of the stuff."

"I wouldn't touch it, sir," warned Jager, but this time it was he who spoke too late. Lanark's boot-toe had nudged the object into plain sight, and Lanark had put down his gauntleted left hand and picked it up.

"What is this?" he asked himself aloud. "Looks rather like some sort of strong-box—foreign, I'd say, and quite cold. Come on, Jager, we'll go upstairs."

In the kitchen, with a strong light from several candles, they examined the find quite closely. It was a dark oblong, like a small dispatch-case or, as Lanark had commented, a strong-box. Though as hard as iron, it was not iron, nor any metal either of them had ever known.

"How does it open?" was Lanark's next question, turning the case over in his hands. "It doesn't seem to have hinges on it. Is this the lid—or this?"

"I couldn't say." Jager peered, his eyes growing narrow with perplexity. "No hinges, as the lieutenant just said."

"None visible, nor yet a lock." Lanark thumped the box experimentally, and proved it hollow. Then he lifted it close to his ear and shook it. There was a faint rustle, as of papers loosely rolled or folded. "Perhaps," the officer went on, "this separate slice isn't a lid at all. There may be a spring to press, or something that slides back and lets another plate come loose."

But Suggs was entering from the front of the house. "Lieutenant, sir! Something's happened to Newton—he was watching on the rock. Will the lieutenant come? And Sergeant Jager, too."

The suggestion of duty brought back the color and self-control that Jager had lost. "What's happened to Newton?" he demanded at once, and hurried away with Suggs.

Lanark waited in the kitchen for only a moment. He wanted to leave the box, but did not want his troopers meddling with it. He spied, beside the heavy iron stove, a fireplace, and

in its side the metal door to an old brick oven. He pulled that door open, thrust the box in, closed the door again, and followed Suggs and Jager.

They had gone out upon the front porch. There, with Corporal Gray and a blank-faced trooper on guard, lay the silent form of Newton, its face covered with a newspaper.

Almost every man of the gathered patrol knew a corpse when he saw one, and it took no second glance to know that Newton was quite dead.

4. *The Mandifers*

JAGER, bending, lifted the newspaper and then dropped it back. He said something that, for all his religiosity, might have been an oath.

"What's the matter, sergeant?" demanded Lanark.

Jager's brows were clamped in a tense frown, and his beard was actually trembling. "His face, sir. It's terrible."

"A wound?" asked Lanark, and lifted the paper in turn. He, too, let it fall back, and his exclamation of horror and amazement was unquestionably profane.

"There ain't no wound on him, Lieutenant Lanark," offered Suggs, pushing his wan, plump face to the forefront of the troopers. "We heard Newton yell—heard him from the top of the rock yonder."

All eyes turned gingerly toward the promontory.

"That's right, sir," added Corporal Gray. "I'd just sent Newton up, to relieve Josserand."

"You heard him yell," prompted Lanark. "Go on, what happened?"

"I hailed him back," said the corporal, "but he said nothing. So I climbed up—that north side's the

easiest to climb. Newton was standing at the top, standing straight up with his carbine at the ready. He must have been dead right then."

"You mean, he was struck somehow as you watched?"

Gray shook his head. "No, sir. I think he was dead as he stood up. He didn't move or speak, and when I touched him he sort of coiled down—like an empty coat falling off a clothesline." Gray's hand made a downward-floating gesture in illustration. "When I turned him over I saw his face, all twisted and scared-looking, like—like what the lieutenant has seen. And I sung out for Suggs and McSween to come up and help me bring him down."

Lanark gazed at Newton's body. "He was looking which way?"

"Over yonder, eastward." Gray pointed unsteadily. "Like it might have been beyond the draw and them trees in it."

Lanark and Jager peered into the waning light, that was now dusk. Jager mumbled what Lanark had already been thinking—that Newton had died without wounds, at or near the moment when the horned image had been shattered upon the cellar floor.

Lanark nodded, and dismissed several vague but disturbing inspirations. "You say he died standing up, Gray. Was he leaning on his gun?"

"No, sir. He stood on his two feet, and held his carbine at the ready. Sounds impossible, a dead man standing up like that, but that's how it was."

"Bring his blanket and cover him up," said Lanark. "Put a guard over him, and we'll bury him tomorrow. Don't let any of the men look at his face. We've got to give him some kind of funeral." He turned to Jager. "Have you a prayer-book, sergeant?"

Jager had fished out the *Long Lost*

Friend volume. He was reading something aloud, as though it were a prayer: "... and be and remain with us on the water and upon the land," he pattered out. "May the Eternal Godhead also——"

"Stop that heathen nonsense," Lanark almost roared. "You're supposed to be an example to the men, sergeant. Put that book away."

Jager obeyed, his big face reproachful. "It was a spell against evil spirits," he explained, and for a moment Lanark wished that he had waited for the end. He shrugged and issued further orders.

"I want all the lamps lighted in the house, and perhaps a fire out here in the yard," he told the men. "We'll keep guard both here and in that gulley to the east. If there is a mystery, we'll solve it."

"Pardon me, sir," volunteered a well-bred voice, in which one felt rather than heard the tiny touch of foreign accent. "I can solve the mystery for you, though you may not thank me."

Two men had come into view, were drawing up beside the little knot of troopers. How had they approached? Through the patrolled brush of the ravine? Around the corner of the house? Nobody had seen them coming, and Lanark, at least, started violently. He glowered at this new enigma.

THE man who had spoken paused at the foot of the porch steps, so that lamplight shone upon him through the open front door. He was skeleton-gaunt, in face and body, and even his bones were small. His eyes burned forth from deep pits in his narrow, high skull, and his clothing was that of a dandy of the forties. In his twig-like fingers he clasped bunches of herbs.

His companion stood to one side in

the shadow, and could be seen only as a huge coarse lump of a man.

"I am Persil Mandifer," the thin creature introduced himself. "I came here to gather from the gardens," and he held out his handfuls of leaves and stalks. "You, sir, you are in command of these soldiers, are you not? Then know that you are trespassing."

"The expediences of war," replied Lanark easily, for he had seen Suggs and Corporal Gray bring their carbines forward in their hands. "You'll have to forgive our intrusion."

A scornful mouth opened in the emaciated face, and a soft, superior chuckle made itself heard. "Oh, but this is not my estate. I am allowed here, yes—but it is not mine. The real Master——" The gaunt figure shrugged, and the voice paused for a moment. The bright eyes sought Newton's body. "From what I see and what I heard as I came up to you, there has been trouble. You have transgressed somehow, and have begun to suffer."

"To you Southerners, all Union soldiers are trespassers and transgressors," suggested Lanark, but the other laughed and shook his fleshless white head.

"You misunderstand, I fear. I care nothing about this war, except that I am amused to see so many people killed. I bear no part in it. Of course, when I came to pluck herbs, and saw your sentry at the top of Fearful Rock——" Persil Mandifer eyed again the corpse of Newton. "There he lies, eh? It was my privilege and power to project a vision up to him in his loneliness that, I think, put an end to his part of this puerile strife."

Lanark's own face grew hard. "Mr. Mandifer," he said bleakly, "you seem to be enjoying a quiet laugh at our expense. But I should point out that we

greatly outnumber you, and are armed. I'm greatly tempted to place you under arrest."

"Then resist that temptation," advised Mandifer urbanely. "It might be disastrous to you if we became enemies."

"Then be kind enough to explain what you're talking about," commanded Lanark. Something swam into the forefront of his consciousness. "You say that your name is Mandifer. We found a girl named Enid Mandifer in the gulley yonder. She told us a very strange story. Are you her stepfather? The one who mesmerized her and——"

"She talked to you?" Mandifer's soft voice suddenly shifted to a windy roar that broke Lanark's questioning abruptly in two. "She came, and did not make the sacrifice of herself? She shall expiate, sir, and you with her!"

Lanark had had enough of this high-handed civilian's airs. He made a motion with his left hand to Corporal Gray, whose carbine-barrel glinted in the light from the house as it leveled itself at Mandifer's skull-head.

"You're under arrest," Lanark informed the two men.

The bigger one growled, the first sound he had made. He threw his enormous body forward in a sudden leaping stride, his gross hands extended as though to clutch Lanark. Jager, at the lieutenant's side, quickly drew his revolver and fired from the hip. The enormous body fell, rolled over and subsided.

"You have killed my son!" shrieked Mandifer.

"Take hold of him, you two," ordered Lanark, and Suggs and Josserand obeyed.

The gaunt form of Mandifer achieved one explosive struggle, then

fell tautly motionless with the big hands of the troopers upon his elbows.

"Thanks, Jager," continued Lanark. "That was done quickly and well. Some of you drag this body up on the porch and cover it. Gray, tumble upstairs and bring down that girl we found."

While waiting for the corporal to return, Lanark ordered further that a bonfire be built to banish a patch of the deepening darkness. It was beginning to shoot up its bright tongues as the corporal ushered Enid Mandifer out upon the porch.

She had arranged her disordered clothing, had even contrived to put up her hair somehow, loosely but attractively. The firelight brought out a certain strength of line and angle in her face, and made her eyes shine darkly. She was manifestly frightened at the sight of her stepfather and the blanket-covered corpses to one side; but she faced determinedly a flood of half-understandable invectives from the emaciated man. She answered him, too; Lanark did not know what she meant by most of the things she said, but gathered correctly that she was refusing, finally and completely, to do something.

"Then I shall say no more," gritted out the spidery Mandifer, and his bared teeth were of the flat, chalky white of long-dead bone. "I place this matter in the hands of the Nameless One. He will not forgive, will not forget."

ENID moved a step toward Lanark, who put out a hand and touched her arm reassuringly. The mounting flame of the bonfire lighted up all who watched and listened—the withered, glaring mummy that was Persil Mandifer, the frightened but defiant shapeliness of Enid in her flower-patterned

gown, Lanark in his sudden attitude of protection, the ring of troopers in their dusty blue blouses. With the half-lighted front of the weathered old house like a stage set behind them, and alternate red lights and sooty shadows playing over all, they might have been a tableau in some highly melodramatic opera.

"Silence," Lanark was grating. "For the last time, Mr. Mandifer, let me remind you that I have placed you under arrest. If you don't calm down immediately and speak only when you're spoken to, I'll have my men tie you flat to four stakes and put a gag in your mouth."

Mandifer subsided at once, just as he was on the point of hurling another harsh threat at Enid.

"That's much better," said Lanark. "Sergeant Jager, it strikes me that we'd better get our pickets out to guard this position."

Mandifer cleared his throat with actual diffidence. "Lieutenant Lanark—that is your name, I gather," he said in the soft voice which he had employed when he had first appeared. "Permit me, sir, to say but two words." He peered as though to be sure of consent. "I have it in my mind that it is too late, useless, to place any kind of guard against surprise."

"What do you mean?" asked Lanark.

"It is all of a piece with your offending of him who owns this house and the land which encompasses it," continued Mandifer. "I believe that a body of your enemies, mounted men of the Southern forces, are upon you. That man who died upon the brow of Fearful Rock might have seen them coming, but he was brought down sightless and voiceless, and nobody was assigned in his place."

He spoke truth. Gray, in his agitation, had not posted a fresh sentry. Lanark drew his lips tight beneath his mustache.

"Once more you feel that it is a time to joke with us, Mr. Mandifer," he growled. "I have already suggested gagging you and staking you out."

"But listen," Mandifer urged him.

Suddenly hoofs thundered, men yelled a double-noted defiance, high and savage—"Yee-hee!"

It was the rebel yell.

Quantrill's guerrillas rode out of the dark and upon them.

5. *Blood in the Night*

NEITHER Lanark nor the others remembered that they began to fight for their lives; they only knew all at once that they were doing it. There was a prolonged harsh rattle of gunshots like a blast of hail upon hard wood; Lanark, by chance or unconscious choice, snatched at and drew his sword instead of his revolver.

A horse's flying shoulder struck him, throwing him backward but not down. As he reeled to save his footing, he saved also his own life; for the rider, a form all cascading black beard and slouch hat, thrust a pistol almost into the lieutenant's face and fired. The flash was blinding, the ball ripped Lanark's cheek like a whiplash, and then the saber in his hand swung, like a scythe reaping wheat. By luck rather than design, the edge bit the guerrilla's gun-wrist. Lanark saw the hand fly away as though on wings, its fingers still clutching the pistol, all agleam in the firelight. Blood gushed from the stump of the riders' right arm, like water from a fountain, and Lanark felt upon himself a spatter as of hot rain. He threw himself in, clutched

the man's legs with his free arm and, as the body sagged heavily from above upon his head and shoulder, he heaved it clear out of the saddle.

The horse was plunging and whinnying, but Lanark clutched its reins and got his foot into the stirrup. The bonfire seemed to be growing strangely brighter, and the mounted guerrillas were plainly discernible, raging and trampling among his disorganized men. Corporal Gray went down, dying almost under Lanark's feet. Amid the deafening drum-roll of shots, Sergeant Jager's bull-like voice could be heard: "Stop, thieves and horsemen, in the name of God!" It sounded like an exorcism, as though the Confederate raiders were devils.

Lanark had managed to climb into the saddle of his captured mount. He dropped the bridle upon his pommel, reached across his belly with his left hand, and dragged free his revolver. At a little distance, beyond the tossing heads of several horses, he thought he saw the visage of Quantrill, clean-shaven and fierce. He fired at it, but he had no faith in his own left-handed snap-shooting. He felt the horse frantic and unguided, shoving and striving against another horse. Quarters were too close for a saber-stroke, and he fired again with his revolver. The guerrilla spun out of the saddle. Lanark had a glimpse he would never forget, of great bulging eyes and a sharp-pointed mustache.

Again the rebel yell, flying from mouth to bearded mouth, and then an answering shout, deeper and more sustained; some troopers had run out of the house and, standing on the porch, were firing with their carbines. It was growing lighter, with a blue light. Lanark did not understand that.

Quantrill did not understand it,

either. He and Lanark had come almost within striking distance of each other, but the guerrilla chief was gazing past his enemy, in the direction of the house. His mouth was open, with strain-lines around it. His eyes glowed. He feared what he saw.

"Remember me, you thieving swine!" yelled Lanark, and tried to thrust with his saber. But Quantrill had reined back and away, not from the sword but from the light that was growing stronger and bluer. He thundered an order, something that Lanark could not catch but which the guerrillas understood and obeyed. Then Quantrill was fleeing. Some guerrillas dashed between him and Lanark. They, too, were in flight. All the guerrillas were in flight. Somebody roared in triumph and fired with a carbine—it sounded like Sergeant Jager. The battle was over, within moments of its beginning.

Lanark managed to catch his reins, in the tips of the fingers that held his revolver, and brought the horse to a standstill before it followed Quantrill's men into the dark. One of his own party caught and held the bits, and Lanark dismounted. At last he had time to look at the house.

It was afire, every wall and sill and timber of it, burning all at once, and completely. And it burnt deep blue, as though seen through the glass of an old-fashioned bitters-bottle. It was falling to pieces with the consuming heat, and they had to draw back from it. Lanark stared around to reckon his losses.

Nearest the piazza lay three bodies, trampled and broken-looking. Some men ran in and dragged them out of danger; they were Persil Mandifer, badly battered by horses' feet, and the two who had held him, Jossierand and Lanark's orderly, Suggs. Both the

troopers had been shot through the head, probably at the first volley from the guerrillas.

Corporal Gray was stone-dead, with five or six bullets in him, and three more troopers had been killed, while four were wounded, but not critically. Jager, examining them, pronounced that they could all ride if the lieutenant wished it.

"I wish it, all right," said Lanark ruefully. "We leave first thing in the morning. Hmm, six dead and four hurt, not counting poor Newton, who's there in the fire. Half my command—and, the way I forgot the first principles of military vigilance, I don't deserve as much luck as that. I think the burning house is what frightened the guerrillas. What began it?"

Nobody knew. They had all been fighting too desperately to have any idea. The three men who had been picketing the gulley, and who had dashed back to assault the guerrillas on the flank, had seen the blue flames burst out, as it were from a hundred places; that was the best view anybody had.

"All the killing wasn't done by Quantrell," Jager comforted his lieutenant. "Five dead guerrillas, sir—no, six. One was picked up a little way off, where he'd been dragged by his foot in the stirrup. Others got wounded, I'll be bound. Pretty even thing, all in all."

"And we still have one prisoner," supplemented Corporal Googan.

He jerked his head toward Enid Mandifer, who stood unhurt, unruffled almost, gazing raptly at the great geyser of blue flame that had been the house and temple of her stepfather's nameless deity.

IT WAS a gray morning, and from the first streaks of it Sergeant Jager had kept the unwounded troopers busy,

making a trench-like grave halfway between the spot where the house had stood and the gulley to the east. When the bodies were counted again, there were only twelve; Persil Mandifer's was missing, and the only explanation was that it had been caught somehow in the flames. The ruins of the house, that still smoked with a choking vapor as of sulfur gas, gave up a few crisped bones that apparently had been Newton, the sentry who had died from unknown causes; but no giant skeleton was found to remind one of the passing of Persil Mandifer's son.

"No matter," said Lanark to Jager. "We know that they were both dead, and past our worrying about. Put the other bodies in—our men at this end, the guerrillas at the other."

The order was carried out. Once again Lanark asked about a prayer book. A lad by the name of Duckin said that he had owned one, but that it had been burned with the rest of his kit in the blue flame that destroyed the house.

"Then I'll have to do it from memory," decided Lanark.

He drew up the surviving ten men at the side of the trench. Jager took a position beside him, and, just behind the sergeant, Enid Mandifer stood.

Lanark self-consciously turned over his clutter of thoughts, searching for odds and ends of his youthful religious teachings. "'Man that is born of woman hath but short time to live, and is full of misery,'" he managed to repeat. "'He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower.'" As he said the words "cut down," he remembered his saber-stroke of the night before, and how he had shorn away a man's hand. That man, with his heavy black beard, lay in this trench before them, with the severed hand under him. Lanark was

barely able to beat down a shudder. "In the midst of life," he went on, "we are in death."

There he was obliged to pause. Sergeant Jager, on inspiration, took one pace forward and threw into the trench a handful of gritty earth.

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust," remembered Lanark. "'Unto Almighty God we commit these bodies'"—he was sure that that was a misquotation worthy of Jager himself, and made shift to finish with one more tag from his memory: "'... in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection unto eternal life'."

He faced toward the file of men. Four of them had been told to fall in under arms, and at his order they raised their carbines and fired a volley into the air. After that, the trench was filled in.

Jager then cleared his throat and began to give orders concerning horses, saddles and what possessions had been spared by the fire. Lanark walked aside, and found Enid Mandifer keeping pace with him.

"You are going back to your army?" she asked.

"Yes, at once. I was sent here to see if I could find and damage Quantrell's band. I found him, and gave at least as good as I got."

"Thank you," she said, "for everything you've done for me."

He smiled deprecatingly, and it hurt his bullet-burnt cheek.

"I did nothing," he protested, and both of them realized that it was the truth. "All that has happened—it just happened."

He drew his eyes into narrow gashes, as if brooding over the past twelve hours.

"I'm halfway inclined to believe what your stepfather said about a

supernatural influence here. But what about you, Miss Mandifer?"

She tried to smile in turn, not very successfully.

"I can go back to my home. I'll be alone there."

"Alone?"

"I have a few servants."

"You'll be safe?"

"As safe as anywhere."

He clasped his hands behind him. "I don't know how to say it, but I have begun to feel responsible for you. I want to know that all will be well."

"Thank you," she said a second time. "You owe me nothing."

"Perhaps not. We do not know each other. We have spoken together only three or four times. Yet you will be in my mind. I want to make a promise."

"Yes?"

They had paused in their little stroll, almost beside the newly filled grave trench. Lanark was frowning, Enid Mandifer nervous and expectant.

"This war," he said weightily, "is going to last much longer than people thought at first. We—the Union—have done pretty well in the West here, but Lee is making fools of our generals back East. We may have to fight for years, and even then we may not win."

"I hope, Mr.—I mean, Lieutenant Lanark," stammered the girl, "I hope that you will live safely through it."

"I hope so, too. And if I am spared, if I am alive and well when peace comes, I swear that I shall return to this place. I shall make sure that you, too, are alive and well."

He finished, very certain that he could not have used stiffer, more stupid words; but Enid Mandifer smiled now, radiantly and gratefully.

"I shall pray for you, Lieutenant Lanark. Now, your men are ready to leave. Go, and I shall watch."

"No," he demurred. "Go yourself, get away from this dreadful place."

She bowed her head in assent, and walked quickly away. At some distance she paused, turned, and waved her hand above her head.

Lanark took off his broad, black hat and waved in answer. Then he faced about, strode smartly back into the yard beside the charred ruins. Mounting his bay gelding, he gave the order to depart.

You will not want to miss the very happenings in the next installment of this story, which tells of an open grave from which the bodies have mysteriously disappeared. To make sure of getting your copy, we suggest that you reserve the next issue of WEIRD TALES at your magazine dealer's now.

Crazy Nell

BY EDGAR DANIEL KRAMER

Crazy Nell goes flitting down
Through the wild and woodland ways
In a ragged, rusty gown,
Mumbling bits of broken lays.

On a day I heard her sing,
"Over bramble-stick and stone,
Like a bird with broken wing,
I must stumble on alone.

"Oh, my love is waiting me,
Weary, lonely till I come;
One and five and four are three,—
Harken to the bittern's drum!"

And I laughed to hear her go,
Like a breath upon the wind;
I was young and could not know
All the mystery behind.

Oh, I mocked her yesterday,
But today my heart can see,
For my love has fled away,—
Crazy Nell now comforts me.

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"He was leaving Enid Mandifer, but he promised in his heart to return."

Fearful Rock

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

*An eerie tale of the American Civil War, and the uncanny evil being who called himself Persil Mandifer, and his lovely daughter—
a tale of dark powers and weird happenings*

The Story Thus Far

THE year is 1862, the place the Missouri-Arkansas border. Enid Mandifer is sent, cowed and semi-hypnotized, as a sacrifice to

the Nameless One worshipped by her stepfather, Persil Mandifer. This mysterious deity, or demon, haunts an ancient house under the shadow of a natural pillar called Fearful Rock.

She encounters Lieutenant Kane

Lanark, scouting with a patrol of Union cavalry for Quantrill's Southern guerrillas. He brings her to the house, where his men have camped, and is puzzled and repelled when she tells what she knows of her stepfather's strange worship.

In the cellar a horned image is discovered. Sergeant Jager, a semi-fanatic, smashes it as diabolical. In the central hollow of the image Lanark finds a strange casket, which he cannot open. He hides it temporarily in a brick oven in the kitchen.

Persil Mandifer and his son Larue appear and protest the presence of the Union soldiers. When they find that Enid Mandifer had not gone through with the sacrifice of herself, they become violently abusive. Larue is shot down by Jager. At this moment the guerrillas charge the house. In the midst of a hand-to-hand battle, the house bursts into blue flame. Terrified, the guerrillas flee, having killed Persil Mandifer and several others.

When the dead are put in a common grave, the bodies of the two Mandifers are missing. Six dead guerrillas are interred together. Lanark, shaken by the mystery, bids farewell to Enid, promising to return when the war is over.

The story continues:

PART II

6. Return

IT WAS spring again, the warm, bright spring of the year 1866, when Kane Lanark rode again into the Fearful Rock country.

His horse was a roan gray this time; the bay gelding had been shot under him, along with two other horses, during the hard-fought three days at West-

port, the "Gettysburg of the West," when a few regulars and the Kansas militia turned back General Sterling Price's raid through Missouri. Lanark had been a captain then, and a major thereafter, leading a cavalry expedition into Kentucky. He narrowly missed being in at the finish of Quantrill, whose death by the hand of another he bitterly resented. Early in 1865 he was badly wounded in a skirmish with Confederate horsemen under General Basil Duke. Thereafter he could ride as well as ever, but when he walked he limped.

Lanark's uniform had been replaced by a soft hat and black frock coat, his face was browner and his mustache thicker, and his cheek bore the jaggedly healed scar of the guerrilla pistol-bullet. He was richer, too; the death of his older brother, Captain Douglas Lanark of the Confederate artillery, at Chancellorsville, had left him his father's only heir. Yet he was recognizable as the young lieutenant who had ridden into this district four years gone.

Approaching from the east instead of the north, he came upon the plain with its grass-levels, its clumps of bushes and trees, from another and lower point. Far away on the northward horizon rose a sharp little finger; that would be Fearful Rock, on top of which Trooper Newton had once died, horrified and unwounded. Now, then, which way would lie the house he sought for? He idled his roan along the trail, and encountered at last an aged, ragged Negro on a mule.

"Hello, uncle," Lanark greeted him, and they both reined up. "Which way is the Mandifer place?"

"Mandifuh?" repeated the slow, high voice of the old man. "Mandifuh, suh, cap'n? Ah doan know no Mandifuh."

"Nonsense, uncle," said Lanark, but without sharpness, for he liked Negroes. "The Mandifer family has lived around here for years. Didn't you ever know Mr. Persil Mandifer and his stepdaughter, Miss Enid?"

"Puhsil Mandifuh?" It was plain that the old fellow had heard and spoken the name before, else he would have stumbled over its unfamiliarities. "No, suh, cap'n. Ah doan nevah heah tella such gemman."

Lanark gazed past the mule and its tattered rider. "Isn't that a little house among those willows?"

The kinky head turned and peered. "Yes, suh, cap'n. Dat place b'long to Pahson Jaguh."

"Who?" demanded Lanark, almost standing up in his stirrups in his sudden interest. "Did you say Jager? What kind of man is he?"

"He jes a pahson—Yankee pahson," replied the Negro, a trifle nervous at this display of excitement. "Big man, suh, got red face. He Yankee. You ain' no Yankee, cap'n, suh. Whaffo you want Pahson Jaguh?"

"Never mind," said Lanark, and thrust a silver quarter into the withered brown palm. He also handed over one of his long, fragrant cheroots. "Thanks, uncle," he added briskly, then spurred his horse and rode on past.

Reaching the patch of willows, he found that the trees formed an open curve that faced the road, and that within this curve stood a rough but snug-looking cabin, built of sawn, unpainted planks and home-split shingles. Among the brush to the rear stood a smaller shed, apparently a stable, and a pen for chickens or a pig. Lanark reined up in front, swung out of his saddle, and tethered his horse to a thorny shrub at the trail-side. As he drew tight the knot of the halter-rope, the door

of heavy boards opened with a creak. His old sergeant stepped into view.

Jager was a few pounds heavier, if anything, than when Lanark had last seen him. His hair was longer, and his beard had grown to the center of his broad chest. He wore blue jeans tucked into worn old cavalry boots, a collarless checked shirt fastened with big brass studs, and leather suspenders. He stared somewhat blankly as Lanark called him by name and walked up to the doorstep, favoring his injured leg.

"It's Captain Lanark, isn't it?" Jager hazarded. "My eyes—" He paused, fished in a hip pocket and produced steel-rimmed spectacles. When he donned them, they appeared to aid his vision. "Indeed it is Captain Lanark! Or Major Lanark—yes, you were promoted—"

"I'm Mr. Lanark now," smiled back the visitor. "The war's over, Jager. Only this minute did I hear of you in the country. How does it happen that you settled in this place?"

"Come in, sir." Jager pushed the door wide open, and ushered Lanark into an unfinished front room, well lighted by windows on three sides. "It's not a strange story," he went on as he brought forward a well-mended wooden chair for the guest, and himself sat on a small keg. "You will remember, sir, that the land hereabouts is under a most unhallowed influence. When the war came to an end, I felt strong upon me the call to another conflict—a crusade against evil." He turned up his eyes, as though to subpena the powers of heaven as witnesses to his devotion. "I preach here, the gospels and the true godly life."

"What is your denomination?" asked Lanark.

Jager coughed, as though abashed. "To my sorrow, I am ordained of no

church; yet might this not be part of heaven's plan? I may be here to lead a strong new movement against hell's legions."

LANARK nodded as though to agree with this surmise, and studied Jager anew. There was nothing left in manner or speech to suggest that here had been a fierce fighter and model soldier, but the old rude power was not gone. Lanark then asked about the community, and learned that there were but seven white families within a twenty-mile radius. To these Jager habitually preached of a Sunday morning, at one farm home or another, and in the afternoon he was wont to exhort the more numerous Negroes.

Lanark had by now the opening for his important question. "What about the Mandifer place? Remember the girl we met, and her stepfather?"

"Enid Mandifer!" breathed Jager huskily, and his right hand fluttered up. Lanark remembered that Jager had once assured him that not only Catholics warded off evil with the sign of the cross.

"Yes, Enid Mandifer." Lanark leaned forward. "Long ago, Jager, I made a promise that I would come and make sure that she prospered. Just now I met an old Negro who swore that he had never heard the name."

Jager began to talk, steadily but with a sort of breathless awe, about what went on in the Fearful Rock country. It was not merely that men died—the death of men was not sufficient to horrify folk around whom a war had raged. But corpses, when found, held grimaces that nobody cared to look upon, and no blood remained in their bodies. Cattle, too, had been slain, mangled dreadfully—perhaps by the strange, unidentifiable creatures that

prowled by moonlight and chattered in voices that sounded human. One farmer of the vicinity, who had ridden with Quantrill, had twice met strollers after dusk, and had recognized them for comrades whom he knew to be dead.

"And the center of this devil's business," concluded Jager, "is the farm that belonged to Persil Mandifer." He drew a deep, tired-sounding breath. "As the desert and the habitation of dragons, so is it with that farm. No trees live, and no grass. From a distance, one can see a woman. It is Enid Mandifer."

"Where is the place?" asked Lanark directly.

Jager looked at him for long moments without answering. When he did speak, it was an effort to change the subject. "You will eat here with me at noon," he said. "I have a Negro servant, and he is a good cook."

"I ate a very late breakfast at a farmhouse east of here," Lanark put him off. Then he repeated, "Where is the Mandifer place?"

"Let me speak this once," Jager temporized. "As you have said, we are no longer at war—no longer officer and man. We are equals, and I am able to refuse to guide you."

Lanark got up from his chair. "That is true, but you will not be acting the part of a friend."

"I will tell you the way, on one condition." Jager's eyes and voice pleaded. "Say that you will return to this house for supper and a bed, and that you will be within my door by sundown."

"All right," said Lanark. "I agree. Now, which way does that farm lie?"

Jager led him to the door. He pointed. "This trail joins a road beyond, an old road that is seldom used. Turn north upon it, and you will come to a part which is grown up in weeds.

Nobody passes that way. Follow on until you find an old house, built low, with the earth dry and bare around it. That is the dwelling-place of Enid Mandifer."

Lanark found himself biting his lip. He started to step across the threshold, but Jager put a detaining hand on his arm. "Carry this as you go."

He was holding out a little book with a gray paper cover. It had seen usage and trouble since last Lanark had noticed it in Jager's hands; its back was mended with a pasted strip of dark cloth, and its edges were frayed and gnawed-looking, as though rats had been at it. But the front cover still said plainly:

John George Hohman's
POW-WOWS
Or
LONG LOST FRIEND

"Carry this," said Jager again, and then quoted glibly: "'Whoever carries this book with him is safe from all his enemies, visible or invisible; and whoever has this book with him cannot die without the holy corpse of Jesus Christ, nor drown in any water, nor burn up in any fire, nor can any unjust sentence be passed upon him.'"

Lanark grinned in spite of himself and his new concern. "Is this the kind of a protection that a minister of God should offer me?" he inquired, half jokingly.

"I have told you long ago that the *Long Lost Friend* is a good book, and a blessed one." Jager thrust it into Lanark's right-hand coat pocket. His guest let it remain, and held out his own hand in friendly termination of the visit.

"Good-bye," said Lanark. "I'll come back before sundown, if that will please you."

He limped out to his horse, untied it and mounted. Then, following Jager's instructions, he rode forward until he reached the old road, turned north and proceeded past the point where weeds had covered the unused surface. Before the sun had fallen far in the sky, he was come to his destination.

It was a squat, spacious house, the bricks of its trimming weathered and the dark brown paint of its timbers beginning to crack. Behind it stood unrepaired stables, seemingly empty. In the yard stood what had been wide-branched trees, now leafless and lean as skeleton paws held up to a relentless heaven. And there was no grass. The earth was utterly sterile and hard, as though rain had not fallen since the beginning of time.

Enid Mandifer had been watching him from the open door. When she saw that his eyes had found her, she called him by name.

7. The Rock Again

THEN there was silence. Lanark sat his tired roan and gazed at Enid, rather hungrily, but only a segment of his attention was for her. The silence crowded in upon him. His unconscious awareness grew conscious—conscious of that blunt, pure absence of sound. There was no twitter of birds, no hum of insects. Not a breath of wind stirred in the leafless branches of the trees. Not even echoes came from afar. The air was dead, as water is dead in a still, stale pond.

He dismounted then, and the creak of his saddle and the scrape of his boot-sole upon the bald earth came sharp and shocking to his quiet-filled ears. A hitching-rail stood there, old-seeming to be in so new a country as this. Lanark tethered his horse, pausing to touch

its nose reassuringly—it, too, felt uneasy in the thick silence. Then he limped up a gravel-faced path and stepped upon a porch that rang to his feet like a great drum.

Enid Mandifer came through the door and closed it behind her. Plainly she did not want him to come inside. She was dressed in brown alpaca, high-necked, long-sleeved, tight above the waist and voluminous below. Otherwise she looked exactly as she had looked when she bade him good-bye beside the ravine, even to the strained, sleepless look that made sorrowful her fine oval face.

"Here I am," said Lanark. "I promised that I'd come, you remember."

She was gazing into his eyes, as though she hoped to discover something there. "You came," she replied, "because you could not rest in another part of the country."

"That's right," he nodded, and smiled, but she did not smile back.

"We are doomed, all of us," she went on, in a low voice. "Mr. Jager—the big man who was one of your soldiers——"

"I know. He lives not far from here."

"Yes. He, too, had to return. And I live—here." She lifted her hands a trifle, in hopeless inclusion of the dreary scene. "I wonder why I do not run away, or why, remaining, I do not go mad. But I do neither."

"Tell me," he urged, and touched her elbow. She let him take her arm and lead her from the porch into the yard that was like a surface of tile. The spring sun comforted them, and he knew that it had been cold, so near to the closed front door of Persil Mandifer's old house.

She moved with him to a little rustic bench under one of the dead trees. Still

holding her by the arm, he could feel at the tips of his fingers the shock of her footfalls, as though she trod stiffly. She, in turn, quite evidently was aware of his limp, and felt distress; but, tactfully, she did not inquire about it. When they sat down together, she spoke.

"When I came home that day," she began, "I made a hunt through all of my stepfather's desks and cupboards. I found many papers, but nothing that told me of the things that so shocked us both. I did find money, a small chest filled with French and American gold coins. In the evening I called the slaves together and told them that their master and his son were dead."

"Next morning, when I wakened, I found that every slave had run off, except one old woman. She, nearly a hundred years old and very feeble, told me that fear had come to them in the night, and that they had run like rabbits. With them had gone the horses, and all but one cow."

"They deserted you!" cried Lanark hotly.

"If they truly felt the fear that came here to make its dwelling-place!" Enid Mandifer smiled sadly, as if in forgiveness of the fugitives. "But to resume; the old aunty and I made out here somehow. The war went on, but it seemed far away; and indeed it was far away. We watched the grass die before June, the leaves fall, the beauty of this place vanish."

"I am wondering about that death of grass and leaves," put in Lanark. "You connect it, somehow, with the unholliness at Fearful Rock; yet things grow there."

"Nobody is being punished there," she reminded succinctly. "Well, we had the chickens and the cow, but no crops would grow. If they had, we needed hands to farm them. Last win-

ter aunty died, too. I buried her myself, in the back yard."

"With nobody to help you?"

"I found out that nobody cared or dared to help." Enid said that very slowly, and did not elaborate upon it. "One Negro, who lives down the road a mile, has had some mercy. When I need anything, I carry one of my gold pieces to him. He buys for me, and in a day or so I seek him out and get whatever it is. He keeps the change for his trouble."

Lanark, who had thought it cold upon the porch of the house, now mopped his brow as though it were a day in August. "You must leave here," he said.

"I have no place to go," she replied, "and if I had I would not dare."

"You would not dare?" he echoed incomprehendingly.

"I must tell you something else. It is that my stepfather and Larue—his son—are still here."

"What do you mean? They were killed," Lanark protested. "I saw them fall. I myself examined their bodies."

"They were killed, yes. But they are here, perhaps within earshot."

It was his turn to gaze searchingly into her eyes. He looked for madness, but he found none. She was apparently sane and truthful.

"I do not see them," she was saying, "or, at most, I see only their sliding shadows in the evening. But I know of them, just around a corner or behind a chair. Have you never known and recognized someone just behind you, before you looked? Sometimes they sneer or smile. Have you," she asked, "ever felt someone smiling at you, even though you could not see him?"

Lanark knew what she meant. "But stop and think," he urged, trying to

hearten her, "that nothing has happened to you—nothing too dreadful—although so much was promised when you failed to go through with that ceremony."

She smiled, very thinly. "You think that nothing has happened to me? You do not know the curse of living here, alone and haunted. You do not understand the sense I have of something tightening and thickening about me; tightening and thickening inside of me, too." Her hand touched her breast, and trembled. "I have said that I have not gone mad. That does not mean that I shall never go mad."

"Do not be resigned to any such idea," said Lanark, almost roughly, so earnest was he in trying to win her from the thought.

"Madness may come—in the good time of those who may wish it. My mind will die. And things will feed upon it, as buzzards would feed upon my dead body."

HER thin smile faded away. Lanark felt his throat growing as dry as lime, and cleared it noisily. Silence was still dense around them. He asked her, quite formally, what she found to do.

"My stepfather had many books, most of them old," was her answer. "At night I light one lamp—I must husband my oil—and sit well within its circle of light. Nothing ever comes into that circle. And I read books. Every night I read also a chapter from a Bible that belonged to my old aunty. When I sleep, I hold that Bible against my heart."

He rose nervously, and she rose with him. "Must you go so soon?" she asked, like a courteous hostess.

Lanark bit his mustache. "Enid Mandifer, come out of here with me."

"I can't."

"You can. You shall. My horse will carry both of us."

She shook her head, and the smile was back, sad and tender this time. "Perhaps you cannot understand, and I know that I cannot tell you. But if I stay here, the evil stays here with me. If I go, it will follow and infect the world. Go away alone."

She meant it, and he did not know what to say or do.

"I shall go," he agreed finally, with an air of bafflement, "but I shall be back."

Suddenly he kissed her. Then he turned and limped rapidly away, raging at the feeling of defeat that had him by the back of the neck. Then, as he reached his horse he found himself glad to be leaving the spot, even though Enid Mandifer remained behind, alone. He cursed with a vehemence that made the roan flinch, untied the halter and mounted. Away he rode, to the magnified clatter of hoofs. He looked back, not once but several times. Each time he saw Enid Mandifer, smaller and smaller, standing beside the bench under the naked tree. She was gazing, not along the road after him, but at the spot where he had mounted his horse. It was as though he had vanished from her sight at that point.

Lanark damned himself as one who retreated before an enemy, but he felt that it was not as simple as that. Helplessness, not fear, had routed him. He was leaving Enid Mandifer, but again he promised in his heart to return.

Somewhere along the weed-teemed road, the silence fell from him like a heavy garment slipping away, and the world hummed and sighed again.

After some time he drew rein and fumbled in his saddlebag. He had lied to Jager about his late breakfast, and now he was grown hungry. His fingers

touched and drew out two hardtacks—they were plentiful and cheap, so recently was the war finished and the army demobilized—and a bit of raw bacon. He sandwiched the streaky smoked flesh between the big square crackers and ate without dismounting. Often, he considered, he had been content with worse fare. Then his thoughts went to the place he had quitted, the girl he had left there. Finally he skimmed the horizon with his eye.

To north and east he saw the spire of Fearful Rock, like a dark threatening finger lifted against him. The challenge of it was too much to ignore.

He turned his horse off the road and headed in that direction. It was a longer journey than he had thought, perhaps because he had to ride slowly through some dark swamp-ground with a smell of rotten grass about it. When he came near enough, he slanted his course to the east, and so came to the point from which he first approached the rock and the house that had then stood in its shadow.

A crow flapped overhead, cawing lonesomely. Lanark's horse seemed to falter in its stride, as though it had seen a snake on the path, and he had to spur it along toward its destination. He could make out the inequalities of the rock, as clearly as though they had been sketched in with a pen, and the new spring greenery of the brush and trees in the gulley beyond to the westward; but the tumbledown ruins of the house were somehow blurred, as though a gray mist or cloud hung there.

Lanark wished that his old command rode with him, at least that he had coaxed Jager along; but he was close to the spot now, and would go in, however uneasily, for a closer look.

The roan stopped suddenly, and Lanark's spur made it sidle without advanc-

ing. He scolded it in an undertone, slid out of the saddle and threaded his left arm through the reins. Pulling the beast along, he limped toward the spot where the house had once stood.

The sun seemed to be going down.

8. *The Grapple by the Grave*

LANARK stumped for a furlong or more, to the yard of the old house, and the horse followed unwillingly—so unwillingly that had there been a tree or a stump at hand, Lanark would have tethered and left it. When he paused at last, under the lee of the great natural obelisk that was Fearful Rock, the twilight was upon him. Yet he could see pretty plainly the collapsed, blackened ruins of the dwelling that four years gone had burned before his eyes in devil-blue flame.

He came close to the brink of the foundation-hollow, and gazed narrowly into it. Part of the chimney still stood, broken off at about a level with the surface of the ground, the rubbish that had been its upper part lying in jagged heaps about its base. Chill seemed to rise from that littered depression, something like the chill he had guessed at rather than felt when he had faced Enid Mandifer upon her porch. The chill came slowly, almost stealthily, about his legs and thighs, creeping snake-like under his clothing to tingle the skin upon his belly. He shuddered despite himself, and the roan nuzzled his shoulder in sympathy. Lanark lifted a hand and stroked the beast's cheek, then moved back from where the house had stood.

He gazed westward, in the direction of the gulley. There, midway between the foundation-hollow and the natural one, was a much smaller opening in the earth, a pit filled with shadow. He re-

membered ordering a grave dug there, a grave for twelve men. Well, it seemed to be open now, or partially open.

He plodded toward it, reached it and gazed down in the fading light. He judged that the dead of his own command still lay where their comrades had put them, in a close row of six toward the east. It was the westward end of the trench that had been dug up, the place where the guerrillas had been laid. Perhaps the burial had been spied upon, and the Southerners had returned to recover their fallen friends.

Yet there was something below there, something pallid and flabby-looking. Lanark had come to make sure of things, and he stooped, then climbed down, favoring his old wound. It was darker in the ditch than above; yet he judged by the looseness of earth under his feet that in one spot, at least, there had been fresh digging—or, perhaps, some other person walking and examining. And the pallid patch was in reality two pallid patches, like discarded cloaks or jackets. Still holding the end of his horse's bridle, he put down his free hand to investigate.

Human hair tickled his fingers, and he snatched them back with an exclamation. Then he dug in his pocket, brought out a match, and snapped it aglow on the edge of his thumbnail.

He gazed downward for a full second before he dropped the light. It went out before it touched the bottom of the hole. But Lanark had seen enough.

Two human skins lay there—white, empty human skins. The legs of them sprawled like discarded court stockings, the hands of them like forgotten gauntlets. And tousled hair covered the collapsed heads of them. . . .

He felt light-headed and sick. Frantically he struggled up out of that grave,

and barely had he come to his knees on the ground above, when his horse snorted and jerked its bridle free from his grasp. Lanark sprang up, tingling all over. Across the trench, black and broad, stood a human—or semi-human—figure.

Lanark felt a certain draining cold at cheek and brow. Yet his voice was steady as he spoke, challengingly:

"What do you want?"

The creature opposite stooped, then bent its thick legs. It was going to jump across the ditch. Lanark took a quick backward step toward his horse—an old Colt's revolver was tucked into his right saddlebag.

But the sudden move on his part was too much for the jangled nerves of the beast. It whickered, squealed, and jerked around. A moment later it bolted away toward the east.

At the same time, the form on the other side of the open grave lunged forward, cleared the space, and came at Lanark.

But it was attacking one who had been in close fights before, and emerged the victor. Lanark, though partially a cripple, had lost nothing of a cavalryman's toughness and resolution. He sprang backward, let his assailant's charge slow before it reached him, then lashed out with his left fist. His gloved knuckles touched soft flesh at what seemed to be the side of the face, flesh that gave under them. Lanark brought over his right, missed with it, and fell violently against the body of the other. For a moment he smelled corruption, and then found his feet and retreated again.

THE black shape drew itself stooping down, as though to muster and concentrate its volume of vigor. It launched itself at Lanark's legs, with

two arms extended. The veteran tried to dodge again, this time sidewise, but his lameness made him slow. Hands reached and fastened upon him, one clutching his thigh, the other clawing at the left-hand pocket of his coat.

But in the moment of capture, the foul-smelling thing seemed to shudder and snatch itself away, as though the touch of Lanark had burned it. A moan came from somewhere in its direction. The crouched body straightened, the arms lifted in cringing protection of the face. Lanark, mystified but desperately glad, himself advanced to the attack. As he came close he threw his weight. It bowled the other backward and over, and he fell hard upon it. His own hands, sinewy and sure, groped quickly upon dank, sticky-seeming garments, found a rumpled collar and then a throat.

That throat appeared to be muddy, or at any rate slippery and foul. With an effort Lanark sank his fingertips into it, throttling grimly and with honest intention to kill. There was no resistance, only a quivering of the body under his knee. The arms that screened the face fell quivering away to either side. At that moment a bright moon shimmered from behind a passing veil of cloud. Lanark gazed down into the face of his enemy.

A puffy, livid, filth-clotted face—but he knew it. Those spiked mustaches, those bulging eyes, the shape, contour and complexion. . . .

"You're one of Quantrill's——" accused Lanark between clenched teeth. Then his voice blocked itself, and his hands jerked away from their strangle hold. His mouth gaped open.

"*I killed you once!*" he cried.

Between him and the body he had pinned down there drifted a wild whirl of vision. He saw again the fight in

the blue fireglow, the assailant who spurred against him, the flash of his own revolver, the limp collapse of the other. He saw, too, the burial next morning—blue-coated troopers shoveling loam down upon a silent row of figures; and, ere clods hid it, a face peeping through a disarranged blanket, a face with staring eyes and mustaches like twin knife-points.

Then his eyes were clear again, and he was on his feet and running. His stiff leg gave him pain, but he slackened speed no whit. Once he looked back. A strange blueness, like a dim reflection of the fire long ago, hung around the base of Fearful Rock. In the midst of it, he saw not one but several figures. They were not moving—not walking, anyway—but he could swear that they gazed after him.

Something tripped him, a root or a fallen branch. He rose, neither quickly nor confidently, aching in all his limbs. The moon had come up, he took time to realize. Then he suddenly turned dizzy and faint all over, as never in any battle he had seen, not even Pea Ridge and Westport; for something bulky and dark was moving toward and against him.

Then it whinnied softly, and his heart stole down from his throat—it was his runaway horse.

Lanark was fain to stand for long seconds, with his arm across the saddle, before he mounted. Then he turned the animal's head southward and shook the bridle to make it walk. At last he was able to examine himself for injuries.

Though winded, he was not bruised or hurt, but he was covered with earth and mold, and his side pocket had been almost ripped from his coat. That had happened when the—the creature yonder had tried to grapple him. He wondered how it had been forced to retreat

so suddenly. He put his hand in the pocket.

He touched a little book there, and drew it forth.

It was Jager's *Long Lost Friend*.

A good hour later, Lanark rode into the yard of his ex-sergeant. The moon was high, and Jager was sitting upon the front stoop.

Silently the owner of the little house rose, took Lanark's bridle rein and held the horse while Lanark dismounted. Then he led the beast around to the rear yard, where the little shed stood. In front of this he helped Lanark unbridle and unsaddle the roan.

A Negro boy appeared, diffident in his mute offer of help, and Jager directed him to rub the beast down with a wisp of hay before giving it water or grain. Then he led Lanark to the front of the house.

Jager spoke at the threshold: "I thank God you are come back safely."

9. Debate and Decision

JAGER'S Negro servant was quite as good a cook as promised. Lanark, eating chicken stew and biscuits, reflected that only twice before had he been so ravenous—upon receiving the news of Lee's surrender at Appomatox, and after the funeral of his mother. When he had finished, he drew forth a cheroot. His hand shook as he lighted it. Jager gave him one of the old looks of respectful disapproval, but did not comment. Instead he led Lanark to the most comfortable chair in the parlor and seated himself upon the keg. Then he said: "Tell me."

Lanark told him, rather less coherently than here set down, the adventures of the evening. Again and again he groped in his mind for explanations, but not once found any to offer.

"It is fit for the devil," pronounced Jager when his old commander had finished. "Did I not say that you should have stayed away from that woman? You're well out of the business."

"I'm well into it, you mean," Lanark fairly snapped back. "What can you think of me, Jager, when you suggest that I might let things stand as they are?"

The frontier preacher massaged his shaggy jowl with thoughtful knuckles. "You have been a man of war and an officer of death," he said heavily. "God taught your hands to fight. Yet your enemies are not those who perish by the sword." He held out his hand. "You say you still have the book I lent you?"

From his torn pocket Lanark drew Hohman's *Long Lost Friend*. Jager took it and stared at the cover. "The marks of fingers," he muttered, in something like awe. He examined the smudges closely, putting on his spectacles to do so, then lifted the book to his nose. His nostrils wrinkled, as if in distaste, and he passed the thing back. "Smell it," he directed.

Lanark did so. About the slimy-looking prints on the cover hung a sickening odor of decayed flesh.

"The demon that attacked you, that touched this book, died long ago," went on Jager. "You know as much—you killed him with your own hand. Yet he fights you this very night."

"Maybe you have a suggestion," Lanark flung out, impatient at the assured and almost snobbish air of mystery that colored the manner of his old comrade in arms. "If this is a piece of hell broke loose, perhaps you did the breaking. Remember that image—that idol-thing with horns—that you smashed in the cellar? You probably freed all the evil upon the world when you did that."

Jager frowned, but pursued his lecture. "This very book, this *Long Lost Friend*, saved you from the demon's clutch," he said. "It is a notable talisman and shield. But with the shield one must have a sword, with which to attack in turn."

"All right," challenged Lanark. "Where is your sword?"

"It is a product of a mighty pen," Jager informed him sententiously. He turned in his seat and drew from a box against the wall a book. Like the *Long Lost Friend*, it was bound in paper, but of a cream color. Its title stood forth in bold black letters:

THE SECRETS
OF
ALBERTUS MAGNUS

"A translation from the German and the Latin," explained Jager. "Printed, I think, in New York. This book is full of wisdom, although I wonder if it is evil, unlawful wisdom."

"I don't care if it is," Lanark almost snatched the book. "Any weapon must be used. And I doubt if Albertus Magnus was evil. Wasn't he a churchman, and didn't he teach Saint Thomas Aquinas?" He leafed through the beginning of the book. "Here's a charm, Jager, to be spoken in the name of God. That doesn't sound unholy."

"Satan can recite scripture to his own ends," misquoted Jager. "I don't remember who said that, but——"

"Shakespeare said it, or something very like it," Lanark informed him. "Look here, Jager, farther on. Here's a spell against witchcraft and evil spirits."

"I have counted at least thirty such in that book," responded the other. "Are you coming to believe in them, sir?"

Lanark looked up from the page.

His face was earnest and, in a way, humble.

"I'm constrained to believe in many unbelievable things. If my experience tonight truly befell me, then I must believe in charms of safety. Supernatural evil like that must have its contrary supernatural good."

Jager pushed his spectacles up on his forehead and smiled in his beard. "I have heard it told," he said, "that charms and spells work only when one believes in them."

"You sound confident of that, at least," Lanark smiled back. "Maybe you will help me, after all."

"Maybe I will."

The two gazed into each other's eyes, and then their hands came out, at the same moment. Lanark's lean fingers crushed Jager's coarser ones.

"Let's be gone," urged Lanark at once, but the preacher shook his head emphatically.

"Slowly, slowly," he temporized. "Cool your spirit, and take council. He that ruleth his temper is greater than he that taketh a city." Once more he put out his hand for the cream-colored volume of Albertus Magnus, and began to search through it.

"Do you think to comfort me from that book?" asked Lanark.

"It has more than comfort," Jager assured him. "It has guidance." He found what he was looking for, pulled down his spectacles again, and read aloud:

"Two wicked eyes have overshadowed me, but three other eyes are overshadowing me—the one of God the Father, the second of God the Son, the third of God the Holy Spirit; they watch my body and soul, my blood and bone; I shall be protected in the name of God."

His voice was that of a prayerful

man reading Scripture, and Lanark felt moved despite himself. Jager closed the book gently and kept it in his hand.

"Albertus Magnus has many such charms and assurances," he volunteered. "In this small book, less than two hundred pages, I find a score and more of ways for punishing and thwarting evil spirits, or those who summon evil spirits." He shook his head, as if in sudden wrath, and turned up his spectacled eyes. "O Lord!" he muttered. "How long must devils plague us for our sins?"

Growing calmer once more, he read again from the book of Albertus Magnus. There was a recipe for invisibility, which involved the making of a thumb-stall from the ear of a black cat boiled in the milk of a black cow; an invocation to "Bedgoblin and all ye evil spirits"; several strange rituals, similar to those Lanark remembered from the *Long Lost Friend*, to render one immune to wounds received in battle; and a rime to speak while cutting and preparing a forked stick of hazel to use in hunting for water or treasure. As a boy, Lanark had once seen water "witched," and now he wondered if the rod-bearer had gained his knowledge from Albertus Magnus.

"Take an earthen pot, not glazed," Jager was reading on, "'and yarn spun by a girl not seven years old'——"

HE BROKE off abruptly, with a little inarticulate gasp. The book slammed shut between his hands. His eyes were bright and hot, and his face pale to the roots of his beard. When he spoke, it was in a hoarse whisper:

"That was a spell to control witches, in the name of Lucifer, king of hell. Didn't I say that this book was evil?"

"You must forget that," Lanark counseled him soberly. "I will admit

that the book might cause sorrow and wickedness, if it were in wicked hands; but I do not think that you are anything but a good man."

"Thank you," said Jager simply. He rose and went to his table, then returned with an iron inkpot and a stump of a pen. "Let me have your right hand."

Lanark held out his palm, as though to a fortune-teller. Upon the skin Jager traced slowly, in heavy capital letters, a square of five words:

S A T O R
A R E P O
T E N E T
O P E R A
R O T A S

Under this, very boldly, three crosses:

x x x

"A charm," the preacher told Lanark as he labored with the pen. "These mystic words and the crosses will defend you in your slumber, from all wicked spirits. So says Albertus Magnus, and Hohman as well."

"What do they mean?"

"I do not know that." Jager blew hotly upon Lanark's palm to dry the ink. "Will you now write the same thing for me, in my right hand?"

"If you wish." Lanark, in turn, dipped in the inkpot and began to copy the diagram. "*Opera* is a word I know," he observed, "and *tenet* is another. *Sator* may be some form of the old pagan word, *satyr*—a kind of horned human monster——"

He finished the work in silence. Then he lighted another cigar. His hand was as steady as a gun-rest this time, and the match did not even flicker in his fingertips. He felt somehow stronger, better, more confident.

"You'll give me a place to sleep for the night?" he suggested.

"Yes. I have only pallets, but you and I have slept on harder couches before this."

Within half an hour both men were sound asleep.

10. *Enid Mandifer Again*

THE silence was not so deadly the following noon as Lanark and Jager dismounted at the hitching-rack in front of Enid Mandifer's; perhaps this was because there were two horses to stamp and snort, two bridles to jingle, two saddles to creak, two pairs of boots to spurn the pathway toward the door.

Enid Mandifer, with a home-sewn sunbonnet of calico upon her head, came around the side of the house just as the two men were about to step upon the porch. She called out to them, anxiously polite, and stood with one hand clutched upon her wide skirt of brown alpaca.

"Mr. Lanark," she ventured, "I hoped that you would come again. I have something to show you."

It was Jager who spoke in reply: "Miss Mandifer, perhaps you may remember me. I'm Parson Jager, I live south of here. Look." He held out something—the *Long Lost Friend* book. "Did you ever see anything of this sort?"

She took it without hesitation, gazing interestedly at the cover. Lanark saw her soft pink lips move, silently framing the odd words of the title. Then she opened it and studied the first page. After a moment she turned several leaves, and a little frown of perplexity touched her bonnet-shaded brow. "These are receipts—recipes—of some kind," she said slowly. "Why do you show them to me, Mr. Jager?"

The ex-sergeant had been watching her closely, his hands upon his heavy hips, his beard thrust forward and his head tilted back. He put forth his hand and received back the *Long Lost Friend*.

"Excuse me, Miss Mandifer, if I have suspected you unjustly," he said, handsomely if cryptically. Then he glanced sidewise at Lanark, as though to refresh a memory that needed no refreshing—a memory of a living-dead horror that had recoiled at very touch of the little volume.

Enid Mandifer was speaking once more: "Mr. Lanark, I had a dreadful night after you left. Dreams . . . or maybe not dreams. I felt things come and stand by my bed. This morning, on a bit of paper that lay on the floor——"

From a pocket in the folds of her skirt, she produced a white scrap. Lanark accepted it from her. Jager came close to look.

"Writing," growled Jager. "In what language is that?"

"It's English," pronounced Lanark, "but set down backward—from right to left, as Leonardo da Vinci wrote."

The young woman nodded eagerly at this, as though to say that she had already seen as much.

"Have you a mirror?" Jager asked her, then came to a simpler solution. He took the paper and held it up to the light, written side away from him. "Now it shows through," he announced. "Will one of you try to read? I haven't my glasses with me."

Lanark squinted and made shift to read:

"Any man may look lightly into heaven, to the highest star; but who dares require of the bowels of Earth their abysmal secrets?"

"That is my stepfather's handwrit-

ing," whispered Enid, her head close to Lanark's shoulder.

He read on: "'The rewards of Good are unproven; but the revenges of Evil are great, and manifest on all sides. Fear will always vanquish love.'"

He grinned slightly, harshly. Jager remembered having seen that grin in the old army days, before a battle.

"I think we're being warned," Lanark said to his old sergeant. "It's a challenge, meant to frighten us. But challenges have always drawn me."

"I can't believe," said Enid, "that fear will vanquish love." She blushed suddenly and rosily, as if embarrassed by her own words. "That is probably beside the point," she resumed. "What I began to say was that the sight of my stepfather's writing—why is it reversed like that?—the sight, anyway, has brought things back into my mind."

"What things?" Jager demanded eagerly. "Come into the house, Miss Mandifer, and tell us."

"Oh, not into the house," she demurred at once. "It's dark in there—damp and cold. Let's go out here, to the seat under the tree."

She conducted them to the bench whither Lanark had accompanied her the day before.

"Now," Jager prompted her, and she began:

"I remember of hearing him, when I was a child, as he talked to his son Larue and they thought I did not listen or did not comprehend. He told of these very things, these views he has written. He said, as if teaching Larue, 'Fear is stronger than love; where love can but plead, fear can command.'"

"A devil's doctrine!" grunted Jager, and Lanark nodded agreement.

"He said more," went on Enid. "He spoke of 'Those Below,' and of how they 'rule by fear, and therefore are

stronger than Those on High, who rule by weak love.'"

"Blasphemy," commented Jager, in his beard.

"Those statements fit what I remember of his talk," Lanark put in. "He spoke, just before we fought the guerillas, of some great evil to come from flouting Those Below."

"I remember," nodded Jager. "Go on, young woman."

"Then there was the box."

"The box?" repeated both men quickly.

"Yes. It was a small case, of dark gray metal, or stone—or something. This, too, was when I was little. He offered it to Larue, and laughed when Larue could not open it."

Jager and Lanark darted looks at each other. They were remembering such a box.

"My stepfather then took it back," Enid related, "and said that it held his

fate and fortune; that he would live and prosper until the secret writing within it should be taken forth and destroyed."

"I remember where that box is," Lanark said breathlessly to Jager. "In the old oven, at——"

"We could not open it, either," interrupted the preacher.

"He spoke of that, too," Enid told them. "It would never open, he told Larue, save in the 'place of the Nameless One'—that must be where the house burned—and at midnight under a full moon."

"A full moon!" exclaimed Lanark.

"There is a full moon tonight," said Jager.

The dread power that inhabited the metal box will be revealed in the fascinating chapters that bring this story to a conclusion in next month's WEIRD TALES. To make sure of getting your copy, we suggest that you reserve it at your magazine dealer's now.

Desert Dawn

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

Dim seas of sand swim slowly into sight
 As if from out the silence swiftly born;
 Faint foremost herald of the coming morn,
 Red tentacles reach out into the night;
 The shadows gray, then fade to rosy white.
 The stars fade out, the greatest and the least;
 Now a red rose is blooming in the east,
 And from its widening petals comes the light.

White, fleecy clouds are fading from on high,
 The sun-god flings afar his golden brands;
 A breeze springs up and races 'mid the dunes,
 A-whisper with old tales and mystic runes;
 Now blue and gold ride rampant in the sky,
 And now full day comes marching o'er the sands.

Eery, mysterious, intriguing

Weird Tales

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graveyard tale of French Revolution

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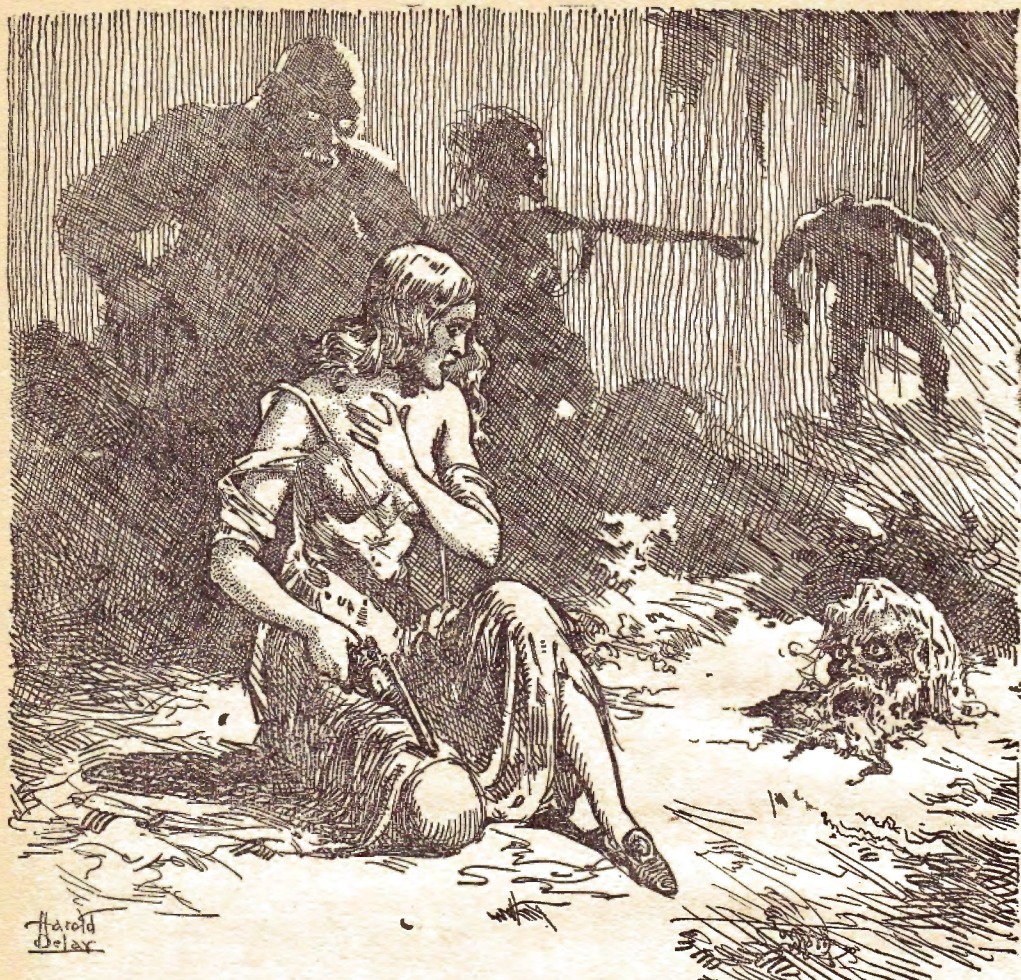
HELLSGARDE

Jirel of Joiry in a weird adventure

By C. L. MOORE

and other tales





"It was a head, but living, as though its owner had been buried to his bearded chin."

Fearful Rock

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

*An eerie tale of the American Civil War, and the uncanny evil being who called himself Persil Mandifer, and his lovely daughter—
a tale of dark powers and weird happenings*

The Story Thus Far
SCENE, the Missouri-Arkansas border, in Civil War times, within the shadow of a natural obelisk called Fearful Rock, a deserted, haunted house. Enid Mandifer is sent

there by her stepfather, Persil Mandifer, as a sacrifice to the Nameless One he worships. She encounters, instead, Lieutenant Kane Lanark, of the Union Army, who has camped his cavalry patrol at the demon-haunted house.

Her story of strange worship puzzles and repels Lanark and his semi-fanatical sergeant, Jager; yet the lieutenant is attracted by her. A horned image, found in the cellar, is smashed by Jager, and in its hollow middle is discovered a strange, unopenable box. Lanark hides this in a brick oven of the house, just as Mandifer and his son appear and predict dire things to come.

Southern guerrillas attack, and flee again when the house bursts into blue flame. Six of the guerrillas have been killed, also the two Mandifer men; but when a grave is prepared, the two latter bodies have disappeared.

After the war, Lanark returns to the Fearful Rock country. He finds Sergeant Jager working as a frontier preacher, and Enid Mandifer living alone and haunted in her stepfather's house. Later, visiting the rock at night, he learns that the guerrillas' grave is opened. Beside it he meets and fights an enemy who proves to be one of the enemy he himself killed. He discusses the mysterious horror with Jager, and they determine to fight it.

Enid Mandifer, interviewed, remembers something of Persil Mandifer's strange worship, and of a box which he claimed held his "fate and fortune"; it could be opened only at midnight under a full moon—such as will shine that very night.

The story continues:

PART III

11. Return of the Sacrifice

THROUGH the cross-hatching of new-leaved branches the full moon shone down from its zenith. Lanark and Enid Mandifer walked gingerly through the night-filled timber in the gully beyond which, they knew, lay the ruins of the

house where so much repellent mystery had been born.

"It's just eleven o'clock," whispered Lanark, looking at his big silver watch. He was dressed in white shirt and dark trousers, without coat, hat or gloves. His revolver rode in the front of his waistband, and as he limped along, the sheath of Jager's old cavalry saber thumped and rasped his left boot-top. "We must be almost there."

"We are there," replied Enid. "Here's the clearing, and the little brook of water."

She was right. They had come to the open space where first they had met. The moonlight made the ground and its new grass pallid, and struck frosty-gold lights from the runlet in the very center of the clearing. Beyond, to the west, lay menacing shadows.

Enid stooped and laid upon the ground the hand-mirror she carried, "Stand to one side," she said, "and please don't look."

Lanark obeyed, and the girl began to undress.

The young man felt dew at his mustache, and a chill in his heart that was not from dew. He stared into the trees beyond the clearing, trying to have faith in Jager's plan. "We must make the devils come forth and face us," the sergeant-preacher had argued. "Miss Mandifer shall be our decoy, to draw them out where we can get at them. All is very strange, but this much we know—the unholy worship did go on; Miss Mandifer was to be sacrificed as part of it; and, when the sacrifice was not completed, all these evil things happened. We have the hauntings, the blue fire of the house, the creature that attacked Mr. Lanark, and a host of other mysteries to credit to these causes. Let us profit by what little we have found out, and put an

end to the Devil's rule in this country."

It had all sounded logical, but Lanark, listening, had been hesitant until Enid herself agreed. Then it was that Jager, strengthening his self-assumed position of leadership, had made the assignments. Enid would make the journey, as before, from her house to the gulley, there strip and say the words with which her stepfather had charged her four springs ago. Lanark, armed, would accompany her as guard. Jager himself would circle far to the east and approach the ruins from the opposite direction, observing, and, if need be, attacking.

These preparations Lanark reviewed mentally, while he heard Enid's bare feet splashing timidly in the water. It came to him, a bit too late, that the arms he bore might not avail against supernatural enemies. Yet Jager had seemed confident. . . . Enid was speaking, apparently repeating the ritual that was supposed to summon the unnamed god-demon of Persil Mandifer:

"A maid, alone and pure, I stand, not upon water nor on land; I hold a mirror in my hand, in which to see what Fate may send. . . ." She broke off and screamed.

Lanark whipped around. The girl stood, misty-pale in the wash of moonlight, all crouched and curved together like a bow.

"It was coming!" she quavered. "I saw it in the mirror—over yonder, among those trees——"

Lanark glared across the little strip of water and the moonlit grass beyond. Ten paces away, between two trunks, something shone in the shadows—shone darkly, like tar, though the filtered moon-rays did not touch it. He saw nothing of the shape, save that it moved and lived—and watched.

He drew his revolver and fired,

twice. There was a crash of twigs, as though something had flinched backward at the reports.

Lanark splashed through the water and, despite his limp, charged at the place where the presence lurked.

12. Jager

IT HAD been some minutes before eleven o'clock when Jager reined in his old black horse at a distance of two miles from Fearful Rock.

Most of those now alive who knew Jager personally are apt to describe him as he was when they were young and he was old—a burly graybeard, a notable preacher and exhorter, particularly at funerals. He preferred the New Testament to the Old, though he was apt to misquote his texts from either; and he loved children, and once preached a telling sermon against the proposition of infant damnation. His tombstone, at Fort Smith, Arkansas, bears as epitaph a verse from the third chapter of the first book of Samuel: *Here am I, for thou didst call me.*

Jager when young is harder to study and to visualize. However, the diary of a long-dead farmer's wife of Pennsylvania records that the "Jager boy" was dull but serious at school, and that his appetite for mince pie amounted to a passion. In Topeka, Kansas, lives a retired railroad conductor whose father, on the pre-Rebellion frontier, once heard Jager defy Southern hoodlums to shoot him for voting Free-state in a territorial election. Ex-Major Kane Lanark mentioned Jager frequently and with admiration in the remarkable pen-and-ink memoir on which the present narrative is based.

How he approached Fearful Rock, and what he encountered there, he himself often described verbally to such of

his friends as pretended that they believed him.

The moonlight showed him a stunted tree, with one gnarled root looping up out of the earth, and to that root he tethered his animal. Then, like Lanark, he threw off his coat, strapping it to the cantle of his saddle, and unfastened his "hickory" blue shirt at the throat. From a saddle-bag he drew a trusty-looking revolver, its barrel sawed off. Turning its butt toward the moon, he spun the cylinder to make sure that it was loaded. Then he thrust it into his belt without benefit of holster, and started on foot toward the rock and its remains of a house.

Approaching, he sought by instinct the cover of trees and bush-clumps, moving smoothly and noiselessly; Jager had been noted during his service in the Army of the Frontier for his ability to scout at night, an ability which he credited to the fact that he had been born in the darkest hours. He made almost as good progress as though he had been moving in broad daylight. At eleven o'clock sharp, as he guessed—like many men who never carry watches, he had become good at judging the time—he was within two hundred yards of the rock itself, and cover had run out. There he paused, chin-deep in a clump of early weeds.

Lanark and the girl, as he surmised, must be well into the gulley by this time. He, Jager, smiled as he remembered with what alacrity Lanark had accepted the assignment of bodyguard to Enid Mandifer. Those two young people acted as if they were on the brink of falling in love, and no mistake. . . .

His eyes were making out details of the scene ahead. Was even the full moon so bright as all this? He could not see very clearly the ruined founda-

tions, for they sat in a depression of the earth. Yet there seemed to be a clinging blue light at about that point, a feeble but undeniable blue. Mentally he compared it to deep, still water, then to the poorest of skimmed milk. Jager remembered the flames that once had burned there, blue as amethyst.

But the blue light was not solid, and it had no heat. Within it, dimmed as though by mist, stood and moved—figures. They were human, at least they were upright; and they stood in a row, like soldiers, all but two. That pair was dark-seeming, and one was grossly thick, the other thin as an exclamation point. The line moved, bent, formed a weaving circle which spread as its units opened their order. Jager had never seen such a maneuver in four years of army service.

Now the circle was moving, rolling around; the figures were tramping counter-clockwise—"withershins" was the old-fashioned word for that kind of motion, as Jager remembered from his boyhood in Pennsylvania. The two darker figures, the ones that had stood separate, were nowhere to be seen; perhaps they were inclosed in the center of the turning circle, the moving shapes of which numbered six. There had been six of Quantrill's guerrillas that died in almost that spot.

The ground was bare except for spring grass, but Jager made shift to crawl forward on hands and knees, his eyes fixed on the group ahead, his beard bristling nervously upon his set chin. He crept ten yards, twenty yards, forty. Some high stalks of grass, killed but not leveled by winter, afforded him a bit of cover, and he paused again, taking care not to rustle the dry stems. He could see the maneuvering creatures more plainly.

They were men, all right, standing

each upon two legs, waving each two arms. No, one of them had only an arm and a stump. Had not one of Quantrill's men—yes! It came to the back of Jager's mind that Lanark himself had cut away an enemy's pistol hand with a stroke of his saber. Again he reflected that there had been six dead guerrillas, and that six were the forms treading so strange a measure yonder. He began to crawl forward again. Sweat made a slow, cold trickle along his spine.

But the two that had stood separate from the six were not to be seen anywhere, inside the circle or out. And Jager began to fancy that his first far glimpse had shown him something strange about that pair of dark forms, something inhuman or sub-human.

Then a shot rang out, clear and sharp. It came from beyond the circle of creatures and the blue-misted ruins. A second shot followed it.

JAGER almost rose into plain view in the moonlight, but fell flat a moment later. Indeed, he might well have been seen by those he spied upon, had they not all turned in the direction whence the shots had sounded. Jager heard voices, a murmur of them with nothing that sounded like articulate words. He made bold to rise on his hands for a closer look. The six figures were moving eastward, as though to investigate.

Jager lifted himself to hands and knees, then rose to a crouch. He ran forward, drawing his gun as he did so. The great uneven shaft that was Fearful Rock gave him a bar of shadow into which he plunged gratefully, and a moment later he was at the edge of the ruin-filled foundation hole, perhaps at the same point where Lanark had stood the night before.

From that pit rose the diluted blue radiance that seemed to involve this quarter. Staring thus closely, Jager found the light similar to that given off by rotten wood, or fungi, or certain brands of lucifer matches. It was like an echo of light, he pondered rather absently, and almost grinned at his own malapropism. But he was not here to make jokes with himself.

He listened, peered about, then began moving cautiously along the lip of the foundation hole. Another shot he heard, and a loud, defiant yell that sounded like Lanark; then an answering burst of laughter, throaty and muffled, that seemed to come from several mouths at once. Jager felt a new and fiercer chill. He, an earnest Protestant from birth, signed himself with the cross—signed himself with the right hand that clutched his revolver.

Yet there was no doubt as to which way lay his duty. He skirted the open foundation of the ruined house, moved eastward over the trampled earth where the six things had formed their open-order circle. Like Lanark, he saw the opened grave-trench. He paused and gazed down.

Two sack-like blotches of pallor lay there—Lanark had described them correctly: they were empty human skins. Jager paused. There was no sound from ahead; he peered and saw the ravine to eastward, filled with trees and gloom. He hesitated at plunging in, the place was so ideal an ambush. Even as he paused, his toes at the brink of the opened grave, he heard a smashing, rustling noise. Bodies were returning through the twigs and leafage of the ravine, returning swiftly.

Had they met Lanark and vanquished him? Had they spied or sensed Jager in their rear?

He was beside the grave, and since

the first year of the war he had known what to do, with enemy approaching and a deep hole at hand. He dived in, head first like a chipmunk into its burrow, and landed on the bottom on all fours.

His first act was to shake his revolver, lest sand had stopped the muzzle.

A charm from the *Long Lost Friend* book whispered itself through his brain, a marksman's charm to bring accuracy with the gun. He repeated it, half audibly, without knowing what the words might mean:

"Ut nemo in sense tentant, descendre nemo; at precedenti spectatur mantica tergo."

At that instant his eyes fell upon the nearest of the two pallid, empty skins, which lay full in the moonlight. He forgot everything else. For he knew that collapsed face, even without the sharp stiletto-like bone of the nose to jut forth in its center. He knew that narrowness through the jowls and temples, that height of brow, that hair white as thistledown.

Persil Mandifer's skull had been inside. It must have been there, and living, recently. Jager's left hand crept out, and drew quickly back as though it had touched a snake. The texture of the skin was soft, clammy, moist . . . *fresh!*

And the other pallidity like a great empty bladder—that could have fitted no other body than the gross one of Larue Mandifer.

Thus, Jager realized, had Lanark entered the grave on the night before, and found these same two skins. Looking up, Lanark had found a horrid enemy waiting to grapple him.

Jager, too, looked up.

A towering silhouette shut out half the starry sky overhead.

13. Lanark

THE combination of pluck and common sense is something of a rarity, and men who possess that combination are apt to go far. Kane Lanark was such a man, and though he charged unhesitatingly across the little strip of water and at the unknown thing in the trees, he was not outrunning his discretion.

He had seen men die in his time, many of them in abject flight, with bullets overtaking them in the spine or the back of the head. It was nothing pleasant to watch, but it crystallized within his mind the realization that dread of death is no armor against danger, and that an enemy attacked is far less formidable than an enemy attacking. That brace of maxims comforted him and bore him up in more tight places than one.

And General Blunt of the Army of the Frontier, an officer who was all that his name implies and who was never given to overstatement, once so unbent as to say in official writing that Captain Kane Lanark was an ornament to any combat force.

And so his rush was nothing frantic. All that faltered was his lame leg. He meant to destroy the thing that had showed itself, but fully as definitely he meant not to be destroyed by it. As he ran, he flung his revolver across to his left hand and dragged free the saber that danced at his side.

But the creature he wanted to meet did not bide his coming. He heard another crash and rattle—it had backed into some shrubs or bushes farther in among the trees. He paused under the branches of the first belt of timber, well aware that he was probably a fair mark for a bullet. Yet he did not expect a gun in the hands of whatever

lurked ahead; he was not sure at all that it even had hands.

Of a sudden he felt, rather than saw, motion upon his left flank. He pivoted upon the heel of his sound right foot and, lifting the saber, spat professionally between hilt and palm. He meant killing, did Lanark, but nothing presented itself. A chuckle drifted to him, a contemptuous burble of sound; he thought of what Enid had said about divining her stepfather's mockery. Again the chuckle, dying away toward the left.

But up ahead came more noise of motion, and this was identifiable as feet—heavy, measured tramping of feet. New and stupid recruits walked like that, in their first drills. So did tired soldiers on the march. And the feet were coming his way.

Lanark's first reaction to this realization was of relief. Marching men, even enemies, would be welcome because he knew how to deal with them. Then he thought of Enid behind him, probably in retreat out of the gully. He must give her time to get away. He moved westward, toward the approaching party, but with caution and silence.

The moonlight came patchily down through the lattice-like mass of branches and twigs, and again Lanark saw motion. This time it was directly ahead. He counted five, then six figures, quite human. The moonlight, when they moved in it, gave him glimpses of butternut shirts, white faces. One had a great waterfall of beard.

Lanark drew a deep breath. "Stand!" he shouted, and with his left hand leveled his pistol.

They stood, but only for a moment. Each figure's attitude shifted ever so slightly as Lanark moved a pace forward. The trees were sparse around him, and the moon shone stronger

through their branches. He recognized the man with the great beard—he did not need to see that one arm was hewed away halfway between wrist and elbow. Another face was equally familiar, with its sharp mustaches and wide eyes; he had stared into it no longer ago than last night.

The six guerrillas stirred into motion again, approaching and closing in. Lanark had them before him in a semi-circle.

"Stand!" he said again, and when they did not he fired, full for the center of that black beard in the forefront. The body of the guerrilla started and staggered—no more. It had been hit, but it was not going to fall. Lanark knew a sudden damp closeness about him, as though he stood in a small room full of sweaty garments. The six figures were converging, like beasts seeking a common trough or manger.

He did not shoot again. The man he had shot was not bleeding. Six pairs of eyes fixed themselves upon him, with a steadiness that was more than unwinking. He wondered, inconsequentially, if those eyes had lids. . . . Now they were within reach.

He fell quickly on guard with his saber, whirling it to left and then to right, the old moulinets he had learned in the fencing-room at the Virginia Military Institute. Again the half-dozen approachers came to an abrupt stop, one or two flinching back from the twinkling tongue of steel. Lanark extended his arm, made a wider horizontal sweep with his point, and the space before him widened. The two forms at the horns of the semi-circle began to slip forward and outward, as though to pass him and take him in the rear.

"That won't do," Lanark said aloud, and hopped quickly forward, then

lunged at the blackbeard. His point met flesh, or at least a soft substance. No bones impeded it. A moment later his basket-hilt thudded against the butter-nut shirt front, the figure reeled backward from the force of the blow. With a practised wrench, Lanark cleared his weapon, cutting fiercely at another who was moving upon him with an unnerving lightness. His edge came home, and he drew it vigorously toward himself—a bread-slicing maneuver that would surely lay flesh open to the bone, disable one assailant. But the creature only tottered and came in again, and Lanark saw that the face he had hacked almost in two was the one with bulge eyes and spike mustaches.

All he could do was side-step and then retreat—retreat eastward in the direction of Fearful Rock. The black-bearded thing was down, stumbled or swooning, and he sprang across it. As he did so the body writhed just beneath him, clutching with one hand upward. Hooked by an ankle, Lanark fell sprawling at full length, losing his revolver but not his sword. He twisted over at his left side, hacking murderously in the direction of his feet. As once before, he cut away a hand and wrist and was free. He surged to his feet, and found the blackbeard also up, thrusting its hairy, fishy-white face at him. With dark rage swelling his every muscle, Lanark carried his right arm back across his chest, his right hand with the hilt going over his left shoulder. Then he struck at the hairy head with all the power of arm and shoulder and, turning his body, thrust in its weight behind the blow. The head flew from the shoulders, as though it had been stuck there ever so lightly.

Then the others were pushing around and upon him. Lanark smelled blood, rot, dampness, filth. He heard,

for the first time, soft snickering voices, that spoke no words but seemed to be sneering at him for the entertainment of one another. The work was too close to thrust; he hacked and hewed, and struck with the curved guard as with brass knuckles. And they fell back from him, all but one form that could not see.

It tottered heavily and gropingly toward him, hunching its headless shoulders and holding out its handleless arms, as though it played with him a game of blind-man's-buff. And from that horrid truncated enemy Lanark fled, fled like a deer for all his lameness.

THEY followed, but they made slow, stupid work of it. Lanark's sword, which could not kill, had wounded them all. He was well ahead, coming to rising ground, toiling upward out of the gully, into the open country shadowed by Fearful Rock.

He paused there, clear of the trees, wiped his clammy brow with the sleeve of his left arm. The moon was so bright overhead that it almost blinded him. He became aware of a kneading, claspng sensation at his right ankle, and looked down to see what caused it.

A hand clung there, a hand without arm or body. It was a pale hand that moved and crawled, as if trying to mount his boot-leg and get at his belly—his heart—his throat. The bright moon showed him the strained tendons of it, and the scant coarse hair upon its wide back.

Lanark opened his lips to scream like any woman, but no sound came. With his other foot he scraped the thing loose and away. Its fingers quitted their hold grudgingly, and under the sole of his boot they curled and writhed upward, like the legs of an overturned

crab. They fastened upon his instep.

When, with the point of his saber, he forced the thing free again, still he saw that it lived and groped for a hold upon him. With his lip clenched bloodily between his teeth, he chopped and minced at the horrid little thing, and even then its severed fingers humped and inched upon the ground, like worms.

"It won't die," Lanark murmured hoarsely, aloud; often in the past he had thought that speaking thus, when one was alone, presaged insanity. "It won't die—not though I chop it into atoms until the evil is driven away."

Then he wondered, for the first time since he had left Enid, where Jager was. He turned in the direction of the rock and the ruined house, and walked wearily for perhaps twenty paces. He was swimming in sweat, and blood throbbed in his ears.

Then he found himself looking into the open grave where the guerrillas had lain, whence they had issued to fight once more. At the bottom he saw the two palenesses that were empty skins.

He saw something else—a dark form that was trying to scramble out. Once again he tightened his grip upon the hilt of his saber.

At the same instant he knew that still another creature was hurrying out of the gully and at him from behind.

14. Enid

LANARK's guess was wrong; Enid Mandifer had not retreated westward up the gully.

She had stared, all in a heart-stopping chill, as Lanark made for the thing that terrified her. As though of themselves, her hands reached down to the earth, found her dress, and pulled it over her head. She thrust her feet into

her shoes. Then she moved, at only a fast walk, after Lanark.

There was really nothing else she could have done, and Lanark might have known that, had he been able to take thought in the moments that followed. Had she fled, she would have had no place to go save to the house where once her stepfather had lived; and it would be no refuge, but a place of whispering horror. Too, she would be alone, dreadfully alone. It took no meditation on her part to settle the fact that Lanark was her one hope of protection. As a matter of simple fact, he would have done well to remain with her, on the defensive; but then, he could not have foreseen what was waiting in the shadowed woods beyond.

She did carry something that might serve as a weapon—the hand-mirror. And in a pocket of her dress lay the Bible, of which she had once told Lanark. She had read much in it, driven by terror, and I daresay it was as much a talisman to her as was the *Long Lost Friend* to Jager. Her lips pattered a verse from it: "Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God . . . for lo, they lie in wait for my soul."

It was hard for her to decide what she had expected to find within the rim of trees beyond the clearing. Lanark was not in sight, but a commotion had risen some little distance ahead. Enid moved onward, because she must.

She heard Lanark's pistol shot, and then what sounded like several men struggling. She tried to peer and see, but there was only a swirl of violent motion, and through it the flash of steel—that would be Lanark's saber. She crouched behind a wide trunk.

"That is useless," said an accented voice she knew, close at her elbow.

She spun around, stared and sprang away. It was not her stepfather that

stood there. The form was human to some degree—it had arms and legs, and a featureless head; but its nakedness was slimy wet and dark, and about it clung a smell of blood.

"That is useless," muttered once more the voice of Persil Mandifer. "You do not hide from the power that rules this place."

Behind the first dark slimness came a second shape, a gross immensity, equally black and foul and shiny. Larue?

"You have offered yourself," said Persil Mandifer, though Enid could see no lips move in the filthy-seeming shadow that should have been a face. "I think you will be accepted this time. Of course, it cannot profit me—what I am now, I shall be always. Perhaps you, too——"

Larue's voice chuckled, and Enid ran, toward where Lanark had been fighting. That would be more endurable than this mad dream forced upon her. Anything would be more endurable. Twigs and thorns plucked at her skirt like spiteful fingers, but she ripped away from them and ran. She came into another clearing, a small one. The moon, striking between the boughs, made here a pool of light and touched up something of metal.

It was Lanark's revolver. Enid bent and seized it. A few feet away rested something else, something rather like a strangely shaggy cabbage. As Enid touched the gun, she saw what that fringed rondure was. A head, but living, as though its owner had been buried to his bearded chin.

"What——" she began to ask aloud. It was surely living, its eyebrows arched and scowled and its gleaming eyes moved. Its tongue crawled out and licked grinning, hairy lips. She saw its smile, hard and brief as a knife

flashed for a moment from its scabbard.

Enid Mandifer almost dropped the revolver. She had become sickeningly aware that the head possessed no body.

"There is the rest of him," spoke Persil Mandifer, again behind her shoulder. And she saw a heart-shaking terror, staggering and groping between the trees, a body without a head or hands.

She ran again, but slowly and painfully, as though this were in truth a nightmare. The headless hulk seemed to divine her effort at retreat, for it dragged itself clumsily across, as though to cut her off. It held out its handless stumps of arms.

"No use to shoot," came Persil Mandifer's mocking comment—he was following swiftly. "That poor creature cannot be killed again."

OTHER shapes were approaching from all sides, shapes dressed in filthy, ragged clothes. The face of one was divided by a dark cleft, as though Lanark's saber had split it, but no blood showed. Another seemed to have no lower jaw; the remaining top of his face jutted forward, like the short visage of a snake lifted to strike. These things had eyes, turned unblinkingly upon her; they could see and approach.

The headless torso blundered at her again, went past by inches. It recovered itself and turned. It knew, somehow, that she was there; it was trying to capture her. She shrank away, staring around for an avenue of escape.

"Be thankful," droned Persil Mandifer from somewhere. "These are no more than dead men, whipped into a mockery of life. They will prepare you a little for the wonders to come."

But Enid had commanded her shuddering muscles. She ran. One of the

things caught her sleeve, but the cloth tore and she won free. She heard sounds that could hardly be called voices, from the mouths of such as had mouths. And Persil Mandifer laughed quietly, and said something in a language Enid had never heard before. The thick voice of his son Larue answered him in the same tongue, then called out in English:

"Enid, you only run in the direction we want you to run!"

It was true, and there was nothing that she could do about it. The entities behind her were following, not very fast, like herdsmen leisurely driving a sheep in the way it should go. And she knew that the sides of the gulley, to north and south, could never be climbed. There was only the slope ahead to the eastward, up which Lanark must have gone. The thought of him strengthened her. If the two of them found the king-horror, the Nameless One, at the base of Fearful Rock, they could face it together.

She was aware that she had come out of the timber of the ravine.

All was moonlight here, painted by the soft pallor in grays and silvers and shadow-blacks. There was the rock lifted among the stars, there the stretch of clump-dotted plain—and here, almost before her, Lanark.

He stood poised above a hole in the ground, his saber lifted above his head as though to begin a downward sweep. Something burly was climbing up out of that hole. But, even as he tightened his sinews to strike, Lanark whirled around, and his eyes glared murderously at Enid.

15. *Evil's End*

"DON'T!" Enid screamed. "Don't, it's only I——"

Lanark growled, and spun back to

face what was now hoisting itself above ground level.

"And be careful of me, too" said the object. "It's Jager, Mr. Lanark."

The point of the saber lowered. The three of them were standing close together on the edge of the opened grave. Lanark looked down. He saw at the bottom the two areas of loose white.

"Are those the——"

"Yes," Jager replied without waiting for him to finish. "Two human skins. They are fresh; soft and damp." Enid was listening, but she was past shuddering. "One of them," continued Jager, "was taken from Persil Mandifer. I know his face."

He made a scuffling kick-motion with one boot. Clods flew into the grave, falling with a dull plop, as upon wet blankets. He kicked more earth down, swiftly and savagely.

"Help me," he said to the others. "Salt should be thrown on those skins—that's what the old legends say—but we have no salt. Dirt will have to do. Don't you see?" he almost shrieked. "Somewhere near here, two bodies are hiding, or moving about, without these skins to cover them."

Both Lanark and Enid knew they had seen those bodies. In a moment three pairs of feet were thrusting earth down into the grave.

"Don't!" It was a wail from the trees in the ravine, a wail in the voice of Persil Mandifer. "We must return to those skins before dawn!"

Two black silhouettes, wetly shiny in the moonlight, had come into the open. Behind them straggled six more, the guerrillas.

"Don't!" came the cry again, this time a command. "You cannot destroy us now. It is midnight, the hour of the Nameless One."

At the word "midnight" an idea

fairly exploded itself in Lanark's brain. He thrust his sword into the hands of his old sergeant.

"Guard against them," he said in the old tone of command. "That book of yours may serve as shield, and Enid's Bible. I have something else to do."

He turned and ran around the edge of the grave, then toward the hole that was filled with the ruins of the old house; the hole that emitted a glow of weak blue light.

Into it he flung himself, wondering if this diluted gleam of the old unearthly blaze would burn him. It did not; his booted legs felt warmth like that of a hot stove, no more. From above he heard the voice of Jager, shouting, tensely and masterfully, a formula from the *Long Lost Friend*:

"Ye evil things, stand and look upon me for a moment, while I charm three drops of blood from you, which you have forfeited. The first from your teeth, the second from your lungs, the third from your heart's own main." Louder went his voice, and higher, as though he had to fight to keep down his hysteria: "God bid me vanquish you all!"

Lanark had reached the upward column of the broken chimney. All about his feet lay fragments, glowing blue. He shoved at them with his toe. There was an oblong of metal. He touched it—yes, that had been a door to an old brick oven. He lifted it. Underneath lay what he had hidden four years ago—a case of unknown construction.

But as he picked it up, he saw that it had a lid. What had Enid overheard from her stepfather, so long ago? "... that he would live and prosper until the secret writing should be taken forth and destroyed ... it would never open, save at the place of the Nameless

One, at midnight under a full moon."

With his thumbnail he pried at the lid, and it came open easily. The box seemed full of darkness, and when he thrust in his hands he felt something crumble, like paper burned to ashes. That was what it was—ashes. He turned the case over, and let the flakes fall out, like strange black snow.

From somewhere resounded a shriek, or chorus of shrieks. Then a woman weeping—that would be Enid—and a cry of "God be thanked!" unmistakably from Jager. The blue light died away all around Lanark, and his legs were cool. The old basement had fallen strangely dark. Then he was aware of great fatigue, the trembling of his hands, the ropy weakness of his lamed leg. And he could not climb out again, until Jager came and put down a hand.

AT ROSY dawn the three sat on the front stoop of Jager's cabin. Enid was pouring coffee from a serviceable old black pot.

"We shall never know all that happened and portended," said Jager, taking a mouthful of home-made bread, "but what we have seen will tell us all that we should know."

"This much is plain," added Lanark. "Persil Mandifer worshipped an evil spirit, and that evil spirit had life and power."

"Perhaps we would know everything, if the paper in the box had not burned in the fire," went on Jager. "That is probably as well—that it burned, I mean. Some secrets are just as well never told." He fell thoughtful, pulled his beard, and went on. "Even burned, the power of that document worked; but when the ashes fell from their case, all was over. The bodies of the guerrillas were dry bones

on the instant, and as for the skinless things that moved and spoke as Mandifer and his son——”

He broke off, for Enid had turned deathly pale at memory of that part of the business.

“We shall go back when the sun is well up,” said Lanark, “and put those things back to rest in their grave.”

He sat for a moment, coffee-cup in hand, and gazed into the brightening sky.

To the two items he had spoken of as plainly indicated, he mentally added a third; the worship carried on by Persil Mandifer—was that name French, perhaps Main-de-Fer?—was tremendously old. He, Persil, must have received teachings in it from a former votary, his father perhaps, and must have conducted a complex and secret ritual for decades.

The attempted sacrifice rite for which Enid had been destined was something the world would never know, not as regards the climax. For a little band of Yankee horsemen, with himself at their head, had blundered into the situation, throwing it completely out of order and spelling for it the beginning of the end.

The end had come. Lanark was sure of that. How much of the power and motivity of the worship had been exerted by the Nameless One that now must continue nameless, how much of it was Persil Mandifer's doing, how much was accident of nature and horror-hallucination of witnesses, nobody could now decide. As Jager had suggested, it was probably as well that part of the mystery would remain. Things being as they were, one might pick up the threads of his normal human existence, and be happy and fearless.

But he could not forget what he had seen. The two Mandifers, able to live or to counterfeit life by creeping from their skins at night, had perished as inexplicably as they had been resurrected. The guerrillas, too, whose corpses had challenged him, must be finding a grateful rest now that the awful semblance of life had quitted their slack, butchered limbs. And the blue fire that had burst forth in the midst of the old battle, to linger ghostwise for years; the horned image that Jager had broken; the seeming powers of the *Long Lost Friend*, as an amulet and a storehouse of charms—these were items in the strange fabric. He would remember them for ever, without rationalizing them.

He drank coffee, into which someone, probably Enid, had dropped sugar while he mused. Rationalization, he decided, was not enough, had never been enough. To judge a large and dark mystery by what vestigial portions touched one, was to err like the blind men in the old doggerel who, groping at an elephant here and there, called it in turn a snake, a spear, a tree, a fan, a wall. Better not to brood or ponder upon what had happened. Try to be thankful, and forget.

“I shall build my church under Fearful Rock,” Jager was saying, “and it shall be called Fearful Rock no more, but Welcome Rock.”

Lanark looked up. Enid had come and seated herself beside him. He studied her profile. Suddenly he could read her thoughts, as plainly as though they were written upon her cheek.

She was thinking that grass would grow anew in her front yard, and that she would marry Kane Lanark as soon as he asked her.

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"That power can sweep armies away for us."

The Valley Was Still

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

*A Federal army division lay in windrows in that weird valley,
not dead nor yet asleep—an eerie tale of the
American Civil War*

WIND touched the pines on the ridge, and stirred the thicker forest on the hills opposite; but the grassy valley between, with its red and

white houses at the bottom, was as still as a painted backdrop in a theater. Not even a grasshopper sang in it.

Two cavalymen sat their mounts at the

edge of the pines. The one in the torn butternut blouse hawked and spat, and the sound was strangely loud at the brink of that silence.

"I'd reckoned the Yanks was down in that there little town," he said. "Channow, it's called. Joe, you look like a Yank yourself in them clothes."

His mate, who wore half-weathered blue, did not appear complimented. The garments had been stripped from an outraged sergeant of Pennsylvania Lancers, taken prisoner at the Seven Days. They fitted their new wearer's lean body nicely, except across the shoulders. His boots were likewise trophies of war—from the Second Manassas, where the Union Army had learned that lightning can strike twice in the same place; and his saddle-cloth, with its U. S. stamp, had also been unwillingly furnished by the Federal army. But the gray horse had come from his father's Virginia farm, and had lived through a year of fierce fighting and fiercer toil. The rider's name was Joseph Paradine, and he had recently declined, with thanks, the offer of General J. E. B. Stuart to recommend him for a commission.

He preferred to serve as a common trooper. He was a chivalric idealist, and a peerless scout.

"You'd better steal some Yankee blues yourself, Dauger," he advised. "Those homespun pants would drop off of you if you stood up in your stirrups. . . . Yes, the enemy's expected to take up a position in Channow Valley. But if he had done so, we'd have run into his videttes by now, and that town would be as noisy as a county fair."

He rode from among the pines and into the open on the lower slope.

"You're plumb exposin' yourself, Joe," warned Dauger anxiously.

"And I'm going to expose myself more," returned Paradine, his eyes on the valley. "We've been told to find the Yankees, es-

tablish their whereabouts. Then our people will tackle them." He spoke with the confidence of triumph that in the summer of 1862 possessed Confederates who had driven the Union's bravest and best all through Virginia. "I'm going all the way down."

"There'll be Yanks hidin'," suggested Dauger pessimistically. "They'll plug you plumb full of lead."

"If they do," called Paradine, "ride back and tell the boys, because then you'll know the Yankees actually are in Channow." He put his horse to the slope, feeling actually happy at the thought that he might suffer for the sake of his cause. It is worthy of repetition that he was a chivalric idealist.

Dauger, quite as brave but more practical, bode where he was. Paradine, riding downhill, passed out of reach of any more warnings.

PARADINE'S eyes were kept on the village as he descended deep into silence as into water. He had never known such silence, not even at the frequent prayings of his very devout regiment. It made him nervous, a different nervousness from the tingling elation brought by battle thunders, and it fairly daunted his seasoned and intelligent horse. The beast tossed its head, sniffed, danced precariously, and had to be urged to the slope's foot and the trail that ran there.

From the bottom of the slope, the village was a scant two miles away. Its chimneys did not smoke, nor did its trees stir in the windless air. Nor was there sign or motion upon its streets and among its houses of red brick and white wood—no enemy soldiers, or anything else.

Was this a trap? But Paradine smiled at the thought of a whole Yankee brigade or more, lying low to capture one lone Southerner.

More likely they thought him a friend,

wearing blue as he did; but why silence in that case, either?

He determined to make noise. If there were hostile forces in and among the houses of Channow, he would draw their attention, perhaps their musket fire. Spurring the gray so that it whickered and plunged, he forced it to canter at an angle toward the nearest houses. At the same time he drew his saber, whetted to a razor-edge contrary to regulations, and waved it over his head. He gave the rebel yell, high and fierce.

"Yee-hee!"

Paradine's voice was a strong one, and it could ring from end to end of a brigade in line; but, even as he yelled, that yell perished—dropped from his lips, as though cut away.

He could not have been heard ten yards. Had his throat dried up? Then, suddenly, he knew. There was no echo here, for all the ridge lay behind, and the hills in front to the north. Even the galloping hoofs of the gray sounded muffled, as if in cotton. Strange . . . there was no response to his defiance.

That was more surprising still. If there were no enemy troops, what about the people of the town? Paradine felt his brown neck-hair, which needed cutting badly, rise and stiffen. Something sinister lay yonder, and warned him away. But he had ridden into this valley to gather intelligence for his officers. He could not turn back, and respect himself thereafter, as a gentleman and a soldier. Has it been noted that Paradine was a chivalric idealist?

But his horse, whatever its blood and character, lacked such selfless devotion to the cause of State's Rights. It faltered in its gallop, tried first to turn back, and then to throw Paradine. He cursed it feelingly, fought it with bit, knee and spur, and finally pulled up and dismounted. He drew the reins forward over the tossing gray

head, thrust his left arm through the loop, and with his left hand drew the big cap-and-ball revolver from his holster. Thus ready, with shot or saber, he proceeded on foot, and the gray followed him protestingly.

"Come on," he scolded, very loudly—he was sick of the silence. "I don't know what I'm getting into here. If I have to retreat, it won't be on foot."

Half a mile more, at a brisk walk. A quarter-mile beyond that, more slowly; for still there was no sound or movement from the village. Then the trail joined a wagon track, and Paradine came to the foot of the single street of Channow.

He looked along it, and came to an abrupt halt.

The street, with its shaded yards on either side, was littered with slack blue lumps, each the size of a human body.

The Yankee army, or its advance guard, was there—but fallen and stony still.

"Dead!" muttered Paradine, under his breath.

But who could have killed them? Not his comrades, who had not known where the enemy was. Plague, then? But the most withering plague takes hours, at least, and these had plainly fallen all in the same instant.

PARADINE studied the scene. Here had been a proper entry of a strange settlement—first a patrol, watchful and suspicious; then a larger advance party, in two single files, each file hugging one side of the street with eyes and weapons commanding the other side; and, finally, the main body—men, horses and guns, with a baggage train—all as it should be; but now prone and still, like tin soldiers strewn on a floor after a game.

The house at the foot of the street had a hitching-post, cast from iron to represent a Negro boy with a ring in one lifted hand. To that ring Paradine tethered the now

almost unmanageable gray. He heard a throbbing roll, as of drums, which he identified as the blood beating in his ears. The saber-hilt was slippery with the sweat of his palm.

He knew that he was afraid, and did not relish the knowledge. Stubbornly he turned his boot-toes forward, and approached the fallen ranks of the enemy. The drums in his ears beat a cadence for his lone march.

He reached and stood over the nearest of the bodies. A blue-bloused infantryman this, melted over on his face, his hands slack upon the musket lying crosswise beneath him. The peaked forage cap had fallen from rumpled, bright hair. The cheek, what Paradine could see of it, was as downy as a peach. Only a kid, young to die; but was he dead?

There was no sign of a wound. Too, a certain waxy finality was lacking in that slumped posture. Paradine extended the point of his saber and gingerly prodded a sun-reddened wrist.

No response. Paradine increased the pressure. A red drop appeared under the point, and grew. Paradine scowled. The boy could bleed. He must be alive, after all.

"Wake up, Yankee," said Joseph Paradine, and stirred the blue flank with his foot. The flesh yielded, but did not stir otherwise. He turned the body over. A vacant pink face stared up out of eyes that were fixed, but bright. Not death—and not sleep.

Paradine had seen men in a swoon who looked like that. Yet even swooners breathed, and there was not a hair's line of motion under the dimmed brass buttons.

"Funny," thought Paradine, not meaning that he was amused. He walked on, because there was nothing left to do. Just beyond that first fallen lad lay the rest of the patrol, still in the diamond-shaped formation they must have held when awake

and erect. One man lay at the right side of the street, another opposite him at the left. The corporal was in the center and, to his rear, another private.

The corporal was, or had been, an excitable man. His hands clutched his musket firmly, his lips drew back from gritted teeth, his eyes were narrow instead of staring. A bit of awareness seemed to remain upon the set, stubby face. Paradine forbore to prod him with the saber, but stooped and twitched up an eyelid. It snapped back into its squint. The corporal, too, lived but did not move.

"Wake up," Paradine urged him, as he had urged the boy. "You aren't dead." He straightened up, and stared at the more distant and numerous blue bodies in their fallen ranks. "None of you are dead!" he protested at the top of his lungs, unable to beat down his hysteria. "Wake up, Yankees!"

He was pleading with them to rise, even though he would be doomed if they did.

"Yee-hee!" he yelled. "You're all my prisoners! Up on your feet!"

"Yo're wastin' yore breath, son."

Paradine whirled like a top to face this sudden quiet rebuke.

A man stood in the front yard of a shabby house opposite, leaning on a picket fence. Paradine's first impression was of noble and vigorous old age, for a mighty cascade of white beard covered the speaker's chest, and his brow was fringed with thick cottony hair. But next moment Paradine saw that the brow was strangely narrow and sunken, that the mouth in the midst of its hoary ambush hung wryly slack, and that the eyes were bright but empty, like cheap imitation jewels.

The stranger moved slowly along the fence until he came to a gate. He pushed it creakily open, and moved across the dusty road toward Paradine. His body and legs were meager, even for an old man,

and he shook and shuffled as though extremely feeble. His clothing was a hodgepodge of filthy tatters.

At any rate, he was no soldier foe. Paradine holstered his revolver, and leaned on his saber. The bearded one came close, making slow circuit of two fallen soldiers that lay in his path. Close at hand, he appeared as tall and gaunt as a flagstaff, and his beard was a fluttering white flag, but not for truce.

"I spoke to 'em," he said, quietly but definitely, "an' they dozed off like they was drunk."

"You mean these troops?"

"Who else, son? They come marchin' from them hills to the north. The folks scattered outa here like rabbits—all but me. I waited. An'—I put these here Yanks to sleep."

HE REACHED under his veil of beard, apparently fumbling in the bosom of his ruined shirt. His brown old fork of a hand produced a dingy book, bound in gray paper.

"This does it," he said.

Paradine looked at the front cover. It bore the woodcut of an owl against a round moon.

The title was in black capitals:

JOHN GEORGE HOHMAN'S
POW-WOWS
OR
LONG LOST FRIEND

"Got it a long time back, from a Pennsylvany witch-man."

Paradine did not understand, and was not sure that he wanted to: He still wondered how so many fighting-men could lie stunned.

"I thought ye was a Yank, an' I'd missed ye somehow," the quiet old voice informed him. "That's a Yank sojer suit, hain't it? I was goin' to read ye some sleep words,

but ye give the yell, an' I knew ye was secesh."

Paradine made a gesture, as though to brush away a troublesome fly. He must investigate further. Up the street he walked, among the prone soldiers.

It took him half an hour to complete his survey, walking from end to end of that unconscious host. He saw infantry, men and officers sprawling together in slack comradeship; three batteries of Parrott guns, still coupled to their limbers, with horses slumped in their harness and riders and drivers fallen in the dust beneath the wheels; a body of cavalry—it should have been scouting out front, thought Paradine professionally—all down and still, like a whole parkful of equestrian statues overturned; wagons; and finally, last of the procession save for a prudently placed rear-guard, a little clutter of men in gold braid. He approached the oldest and stoutest of these, noting the two stars on the shoulder straps—a major general.

Paradine knelt, unbuttoned the frock coat, and felt in the pockets. Here were papers. The first he unfolded was the copy of an order:

General T. F. Kottler,
Commanding ——— Division, USA.

General:

You will move immediately, with your entire force, taking up a strong defensive position in the Channow Valley. . . .

This, then, was Kottler's Division. Paradine estimated the force as five thousand bluecoats, all veterans by the look of them, but nothing that his own comrades would have feared. He studied the wagon-train hungrily. It was packed with food and clothing, badly needed by the Confederacy. He would do well to get back and report his find. He turned, and saw that the old man with the white beard had followed him along the street.

"I reckon," he said to Paradine, in tones of mild reproach, "ye think I'm a-lyin' about puttin' these here Yanks to sleep."

Paradine smiled at him, as he might have smiled at an importunate child. "I didn't call you a liar," he temporized, "and the Yankees are certainly in dreamland. But I think there must be some natural explanation for——"

"Happen I kin show ye better'n tell ye," cut in the dotard. His paper-bound book was open in his scrawny hands. Stooping close to it, he began rapidly to mumble something. His voice suddenly rose, sounded almost young:

"Now, stand there till I tell ye to move!"

Paradine, standing, fought for explanations. What was happening to him could be believed, was even logical. Mesmerism, scholars called it, or a newer name, hypnotism.

As a boy he, Paradine, had amused himself by holding a hen's beak to the floor and drawing a chalk line therefrom. The hen could never move until he lifted it away from that mock tether. That was what now befell him, he was sure. His muscles were slack, or perhaps tense; he could not say by the feel. In any case, they were immovable. He could not move eye. He could not loosen grip on his saber-hilt. Yes, hypnotism. If only he rationalized it, he could break the spell.

But he remained motionless, as though he were the little iron figure to which his horse was tethered, yonder at the foot of the street.

The old man surveyed him with a flicker of shrewdness in those bright eyes that had seemed foolish.

"I used only half power. Happen ye kin still hear me. So listen:

"My name's Teague. I live down yon by the crick. I'm a witch-man, an' my pappy was a witch-man afore me. He was the seventh son of a seventh son—an' I was *his* seventh son. I know conjer stuff—

black an' white, forrard an' back'ard. It's my livin'.

"Folks in Channow make fun o' me, like they did o' my pappy when he was livin' but they buy my charms. Things to bring love or hate, if they hanker fer 'em. Cures fer sick hogs an' calves. Sayin's to drive away fever. All them things. I done it fer Channow folks all my life."

IT WAS a proud pronouncement, Paradine realized. Here was the man diligent in business, who could stand before kings. So might speak a statesman who had long served his constituency, or the editor of a paper that had built respectful traditions, or a doctor who had guarded a town's health for decades, or a blacksmith who took pride in his lifetime of skilled toil. This gaffer who called himself a witch-man considered that he had done service, and was entitled to respect and gratitude. The narrator went on, more grimly:

"Sometimes I been laffed at, an' told to mind my own bizness. Young 'uns has hooted, an' throwed stones. I coulda cursed 'em—but I didn't. Nossir. They's my friends an' neighbors—Channow folks. I kep' back evil from 'em."

The old figure straightened, the white beard jutted forward. An exultant note crept in.

"But when the Yanks come, an' everybody run afore 'em but me, I didn't have no scruples! Invaders! Tyrants! Thiev-in' skunks in blue!" Teague sounded like a recruiting officer for a Texas regiment. "I didn't owe them nothin'—an' here in the street I faced 'em. I dug out this here little book, an' I read the sleep words to 'em. See," and the old hands gestured sweepingly, "they sleep till I tell 'em to wake. *If* I ever tell 'em!"

Paradine had to believe this tale of occult patriotism. There was nothing else to believe in its place. The old man who

called himself Teague smiled twinklingly.

"Yo're secesh. Ye fight the Yanks. If ye'll be good, an' not gimme no argyments, blink yore left eye."

Power of blinking returned to that lid, and Paradine lowered it submissively.

"Now ye kin move again—I'll say the words."

He leafed through the book once more, and read out: "Ye horsemen an' footmen, conjered here at this time, ye may pass on in the name of . . ." Paradine did not catch the name, but it had a sound that chilled him. Next instant, motion was restored to his arms and legs. The blood tingled sharply in them, as if they had been asleep.

Teague offered him a hand, and Paradine took it. That hand was froggy cold and soft, for all its boniness.

"Arter this," decreed Teague, "do what I tell ye, or I'll read ye somethin' ye'll like less." And he held out the open book significantly.

Paradine saw the page—it bore the number 60 in one corner, and at its top was a heading in capitals: TO RELEASE SPELL-BOUND PERSONS. Beneath were the lines with which Teague had set him in motion again, and among them were smudged inky marks.

"You've crossed out some words," Paradine said at once.

"Yep. An' wrote in others." Teague held the book closer to him.

Paradine felt yet another chill, and beat down a desire to turn away. He spoke again, because he felt that he should.

"It's the name of God that you've cut out, Teague. Not once, but three times. Isn't that blasphemy? And you've written in——"

"The name of somebody else." Teague's beard ruffled into a grin. "Young feller, ye don't understand. This book was wrote full of the name of God. That name is good—fer some things. But fer curses an'

deaths an' overthrows, sech as this 'un—well, I changed the names an' spells by puttin' in that other name ye saw. An' it works fine." He grinned wider as he surveyed the tumbled thousands around them, then shut the book and put it away.

Paradine had been well educated. He had read Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, at the University of Virginia, and some accounts of the New England witchcraft cases. He could grasp, though he had never been called upon to consider, the idea of an alliance with evil. All he could reply was:

"I don't see more than five thousand Yankees in this town. Our boys can whip that many and more, without any spells."

Teague shook his old head. "Come on, let's go an' set on them steps," he invited, pointing.

The two walked back down the street, entered a yard and dropped down upon a porch. The shady leaves above them hung as silent as chips of stone. Through the fence-pickets showed the blue lumps of quiet that had been a fighting division of Federals. There was no voice, except Teague's.

"Ye don't grasp what war means, young feller. Sure, the South is winnin' now—but to win, men must die. Powder must burn. An' the South hain't got men an' powder enough to keep it up."

If Paradine had never thought of that before, neither had his superiors, except possibly General Lee. Yet it was plainly true.

Teague extended the argument:

"But if every Yank army was put to sleep, fast's it got in reach—what then? How'd ye like to lead yore own army into Washington an' grab ole Abe Lincoln right outen the White House? How'd ye like to be the second greatest man o' the South?"

"Second greatest man?" echoed Paradine breathlessly, forgetting to fear. He was being tempted as few chivalric ideal-

ists can endure. "Second only to—Robert E. Lee!"

The name of his general trembled on his lips. It trembles to this day, on the lips of those who remember. But Teague only snickered, and combed his beard with fingers like skinny sticks.

"Ye don't ketch on yet. Second man, not to Lee, but to—me, Teague! Fer I'd be a-runnin' things!"

Paradine, who had seen and heard so much to amaze him during the past hour, had yet the capacity to gasp. His saber was between his knees, and his hands tightened on the hilt until the knuckles turned pale. Teague gave no sign. He went on:

"I hain't never got no respect here in Channow. Happen it's time I showed 'em what I can do." His eyes studied the windrows of men he had caused to drop down like sickled wheat. Creases of proud triumph deepened around his eyes. "We'll do all the Yanks this way, son. Yore generals hain't never done nothing like it, have they?"

His generals—Paradine had seen them on occasion. Jackson, named Stonewall for invincibility, kneeling in unashamed public prayer; Jeb Stuart, with his plume and his brown beard, listening to the clang of Sweeney's banjo; Hood, who outcharged even his wild Texans; Polk blessing the soldiers in the dawn before battle, like a prophet of brave old days; and Lee, the gray knight, at whom Teague had laughed. No, they had never done anything like it. And, if they could, they would not.

"Teague," said Paradine, "this isn't right."

"Not right? Oh, I know what ye mean. Ye don't like them names I wrote into the *Pow-Wows*, do ye? But ain't everything fair in love an' war?"

TEAGUE laid a persuasive claw on the sleeve of Paradine's looted jacket. "Listen this oncet. Yore idee is to win with

sword an' gun. Mine's to win by conjurin'. Which is the quickest way? The easiest way? The only way?"

"To my way of thinking, the only way is by fair fight. God," pronounced Paradine, as stiffly as Leonidas Polk himself, "watches armies."

"An' so does somebody else," responded Teague. "Watches—an' listens. Happen he's listenin' this minit. Well, lad, I need a sojer to figger army things fer me. You joinin' me?"

Not only Teague waited for Paradine's answer. . . . The young trooper remembered, from *Pilgrim's Progress*, what sort of dealings might be fatal. Slowly he got to his feet.

"The South doesn't need that kind of help," he said flatly.

"Too late to back out," Teague told him.

"What do you mean?"

"The help's been asked fer already, son. An' it's been given. A contract, ye might call it. If the contract's broke—well, happen the other party'll get mad. They can be worse enemies 'n Yanks."

Teague, too, rose to his feet. "Too late," he said again. "That power can sweep armies away fer us. But if we say no—well, it's been roused up, it'll still sweep away armies—Southern armies. Ye think I shouldn't have started sech a thing? But I've started it. Can't turn back now."

Victory through evil—what would it become in the end? Faust's story told, and so did the legend of Gilles de Retz, and the play about Macbeth. But there was also the tale of the sorcerer's apprentice, and of what befell him when he tried to reject the force he had thoughtlessly evoked.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked, through lips that muddled the words.

"Good lad, I thought ye'd see sense. First off, I want yore name to the bargain. Then me 'n' you can lick the Yanks."

Lick the Yankees! Paradine remembered

a gayly profane catch-phrase of the Confederate camp: "Don't say Yankee, say damned Yankee." But what about a damned Confederacy? Teague spoke of the day of victory; what of the day of reckoning?

What payment would this ally ask in the end?

Again Faust popped into his mind. He imagined the Confederacy as a Faust among the nations, devil-lifted, devil-nurtured—and devil-doomed, by the connivance of one Joseph Paradine.

Better disaster, in the way of man's warfare.

The bargain was offered him for all the South. For all the South he must reject, completely and finally.

Aloud he said: "My name? Signed to something?"

"Right here'll do."

Once more Teague brought forth the *Pow-Wows* book which he had edited so strangely. "Here, son, on this back page—in blood."

Paradine bowed his head. It was to conceal the look in his eyes, and he hoped to look as though he acquiesced. He drew his saber, passed it to his left hand. Upon its tip he pressed his right forefinger. A spot of dull pain, and a drop of blood creeping forth, as had appeared on the wrist of the ensorcelled boy lying yonder among the Yankees in the street.

"That'll be enough to sign with," approved Teague.

He flattened out the book, exposing the rear flyleaf. Paradine extended his reddened forefinger. It stained the rough white paper.

"J for Joseph," dictated Teague. "Yep, like that——"

PARADINE galvanized into action. His bloody right hand seized the book, wrenching it from the trembling fingers. With the saber in his left hand, he struck.

A pretty stroke for even a practised swordsman; the honed edge of the steel found the shaggy side of Teague's scrawny neck. Paradine felt bone impeding his powerful drawing slash. Then he felt it no longer. The neck had sliced in two, and for a moment Teague's head hung free in the air, like a lantern on a wire.

The bright eyes fixed Paradine's, the mouth fell open in the midst of the beard, trying to speak a word that would not come. Then it fell, bounced like a ball, and rolled away. The headless trunk stood on braced feet, crumpling slowly. Paradine stepped away from it, and it collapsed upon the steps of the house.

Again there was utter silence in the town and valley of Channow. The blue soldiers did not budge where they lay. Paradine knew that he alone moved and breathed and saw—no, not entirely alone. His horse was tethered at the end of the street.

He flung away his saber and ran, ashamed no more of his dread. Reaching the gray, he found his fingers shaky, but he wrenched loose the knotted reins. Flinging himself into the saddle, he rode away across the level and up the slope.

The pines sighed gently, and that sound gave him comfort after so much soundlessness.

He dismounted, his knees swaying as though their tendons had been cut, and studied the earth. Here were the footprints of Dauger's horse. Here also was a cleft stick, and in it a folded scrap of paper, a note. He lifted it, and read the penciled scrawl:

Dear frend Joe, you ant com back so I left like you said to bring up the boys. I hope your alright & if the Yankies have got you well get you back.

L. Dauger.

His comrades were coming, then, with gun and sword. They expected to meet

Union soldiers. Paradine gazed back into the silence-brimmed valley, then at what he still held in his right hand. It was the *Pow-Wows* book, marked with a wet capital J in his own blood.

What had Teague insisted? The one whose name had been invoked would be fatally angry if his help were refused. But Paradine was going to refuse it.

He turned to Page 60. His voice was shaky, but he managed to read aloud:

"Ye horsemen and footmen, conjured here at this time, ye may pass on in the name of"—he faltered, but disregarded the ink-blotting, and the substituted names—"of Jesus Christ, and through the word of God."

Again he gulped, and finished. "Ye may now ride on and pass."

From under his feet burst a dry, startling thunder of sound, a partridge rising to the sky. Farther down the slope a crow took wing, cawing querulously. Wind wakened in the Channow Valley; Paradine saw the distant trees of the town stir with it. Then a confused din came to his ears, as though something besides wind was wakening.

After a moment he heard the notes of a bugle, shrill and tremulous, sounding an alarm.

Paradine struck fire, and built it up with

fallen twigs. Into the hottest heart of it he thrust Teague's book of charms. The flame gnawed eagerly at it, the pages crumpled and fanned and blackened with the heat. For a moment he saw, standing out among charred fragments, a blood-red J, his writing, as though it fought for life. Then it, too, was consumed, and there were only ashes. Before the last red tongue subsided, his ears picked up a faint rebel yell, and afar into the valley rode Confederate cavalry.

He put his gray to the gallop, got down the slope and joined his regiment before it reached the town. On the street a Union line was forming. There was hot, fierce fighting, such as had scattered and routed many a Northern force.

But, at the end of it, the Southerners ran like foxes before hounds, and those who escaped counted themselves lucky.

IN HIS later garrulous years, Joseph Paradine was apt to say that the war was lost, not at Antietam or Gettysburg, but at a little valley hamlet called Channow. Refusal of a certain alliance, he would insist, was the cause; that offered ally fought thenceforth against the South.

But nobody paid attention, except to laugh or to pity. So many veterans go crazy.

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Voice in a Veteran's Ear

By GANS T. FIELD

I am the man you killed. Had I been able,
I would have killed you first, that day we met
Between the shell-torn sty and ruined stable,
Rain in our eyes, shin-deep in mud and wet.
My broken trigger failed beneath my finger.
You smiled—and scowled, and raised your gun to me. . . .
Yet, after twenty years, I mow and linger
Where your hot eyes, and yours alone, may see.

Lo, here I crouch, here in this shadowed corner;
I creep before you on this moonless way;
I mutter in this bush; your breath is stilled.
You, from my murderer, have turned my mourner—
But, though you weep and name the saints and pray,
I shall remain. *I am the man you killed.*



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The Witch's Cat

By GANS T. FIELD

An odd and curious tale of witchcraft, and a skinny black cat that lived in the old woman's house in the hollow

OLD JAEI BETTISS, who lived in the hollow among the cypresses, was not a real witch.

It makes no difference that folk thought she was, and walked fearfully wide of her shadow. Nothing can be proved by the fact that she was as disgustingly ugly without as she was wicked within. It is quite irrelevant that evil was her study and profession and pleasure. She was no witch; she only pretended to be.

Jael Bettiss knew that all laws providing for the punishment of witches had been repealed, or at the least forgotten. As to being feared and hated, that was meat and drink to Jael Bettiss, living secretly alone in the hollow.

The house and the hollow belonged to a kindly old villager, who had been elected marshal and was too busy to look after his property. Because he was easy-going and perhaps a little daunted, he let Jael Bettiss live there rent-free. The house was no longer snug; the back of its roof was broken in, the eaves drooped slackly. At some time or other the place had been painted brown, before that with ivory black. Now both coats of color peeled away in huge flakes, making the clapboards seem scrofulous. The windows had been broken in every small, grubby pane, and mended with coarse brown paper, so that they were like cast and blurred eyes. Behind was the muddy, bramble-choked back yard, and behind that yawned the old quarry, now abandoned and full of black

water. As for the inside—but few ever saw it.

Jael Bettiss did not like people to come into her house. She always met callers on the old cracked doorstep, draped in a cloak of shadowy black, with gray hair straggling, her nose as hooked and sharp as the beak of a buzzard, her eyes filmy and sore-looking, her wrinkle-bordered mouth always grinning and showing her yellow, chisel-shaped teeth.

The near-by village was an old-fashioned place, with stone flags instead of concrete for pavements, and the villagers were the simplest of men and women. From them Jael Bettiss made a fair living, by selling love philtres, or herbs to cure sickness, or charms to ward off bad luck. When she wanted extra money, she would wrap her old black cloak about her and, tramping along a country road, would stop at a cowpen and ask the farmer what he would do if his cows went dry. The farmer, worried, usually came at dawn next day to her hollow and bought a good-luck charm. Occasionally the cows would go dry anyway, by accident of nature, and their owner would pay more and more, until their milk returned to them.

Now and then, when Jael Bettiss came to the door, there came with her the gaunt black cat, Gib.

Gib was not truly black, any more than Jael Bettiss was truly a witch. He had been born with white markings at muzzle, chest and forepaws, so that he looked to be in



"You're the only witness, and I don't want any trace of you around."

full evening dress. Left alone, he would have grown fat and fluffy. But Jael Bettiss, who wanted a fearsome pet, kept all his white spots smeared with thick soot, and underfed him to make him look rakish and lean.

On the night of the full moon, she would drive poor Gib from her door. He would wander to the village in search of food, and would wail mournfully in the yards. Awakened householders would angrily throw boots or pans or sticks of kindling. Often Gib was hit, and his cries were sharpened by pain. When that happened, Jael Bettiss took care to be seen next morning with a bandage on head or wrist. Some of the simplest villagers thought that Gib was really the old woman, magically transformed. Her reputation grew, as did Gib's unpopularity. But Gib did not deserve mistrust—like all cats, he was a practical philosopher, who wanted to be comfortable and quiet and dignified. At bottom, he was amiable. Like all cats, too, he loved his home above all else; and the house in the hollow, be it ever so humble and often cruel, was home. It was unthinkable to him that he might live elsewhere.

In the village he had two friends—black-eyed John Frey, the storekeeper's son, who brought the mail to and from the county seat, and Ivy Hill, pretty blond daughter of the town marshal, the same town marshal who owned the hollow and let Jael Bettiss live in the old house. John Frey and Ivy Hill were so much in love with each other that they loved everything else, even black-stained, hungry Gib. He was grateful; if he had been able, he would have loved them in return. But his little heart had room for one devotion only, and that was given to the house in the hollow.

ONE day, Jael Bettiss slouched darkly into old Mr. Frey's store, and up to the counter that served for postoffice. Leering, she gave John Frey a letter. It

was directed to a certain little-known publisher, asking for a certain little-known book. Several days later, she appeared again, received a parcel, and bore it to her home.

In her gloomy, secret parlor, she unwrapped her purchase. It was a small, drab volume, with no title on cover or back. Sitting at the rickety table, she began to read. All evening and most of the night she read, forgetting to give Gib his supper, though he sat hungrily at her feet.

At length, an hour before dawn, she finished. Laughing loudly and briefly, she turned her beak-nose toward the kerosene lamp on the table. From the book she read aloud two words. The lamp went out, though she had not blown at it. Jael Bettiss spoke one commanding word more, and the lamp flamed alight again.

"At last!" she cried out in shrill exultation, and grinned down at Gib. Her lips drew back from her yellow chisels of teeth. "At last!" she crowed again. "Why don't you speak to me, you little brute? . . . Why don't you, indeed?"

She asked that final question as though she had been suddenly inspired. Quickly she glanced through the back part of the book, howled with laughter over something she found there, then sprang up and scuttled like a big, filthy crab into the dark, windowless cell that was her kitchen. There she mingled salt and malt in the palm of her skinny right hand. After that, she rummaged out a bundle of dried herbs, chewed them fine and spat them into the mixture. Stirring again with her forefinger, she returned to the parlor. Scanning the book to refresh her memory, she muttered a nasty little rhyme. Finally she dashed the mess suddenly upon Gib.

He retreated, shaking himself, outraged and startled. In a corner he sat down, and bent his head to lick the smeared fragments of the mixture away. But they revolted his tongue and palate, and he paused

in the midst of this chore, so important to cats; and meanwhile Jael Bettiss yelled, "Speak!"

Gib crouched and blinked, feeling sick. His tongue came out and steadied his lips. Finally he said: "I want something to eat."

His voice was small and high, like a little child's, but entirely understandable. Jael Bettiss was so delighted that she laughed and clapped her bony knees with her hands, in self-applause.

"It worked!" she cried. "No more humbug about me, you understand? I'm a real witch at last, and not a fraud!"

Gib found himself able to understand all this, more clearly than he had ever understood human affairs before. "I want something to eat," he said again, more definitely than before. "I didn't have any supper, and it's nearly——"

"Oh, stow your gab!" snapped his mistress. "This book, crammed with knowledge and strength, that made me able to do it. I'll never be without it again, and it'll teach me all the things I've only guessed at and mumbled about. I'm a real witch now, I say. And if you don't think I'll make those ignorant sheep of villagers realize it——"

Once more she went off into gales of wild, cracked mirth, and threw a dish at Gib. He darted away into a corner just in time, and the missile crashed into blue-and-white china fragments against the wall. But Jael Bettiss read aloud from her book an impressive gibberish, and the dish reformed itself on the floor; the bits crept together and joined and the cracks disappeared, as trickling drops of water form into a pool. And finally, when the witch's twig-like forefinger beckoned, the dish floated upward like a leaf in a breeze and set itself gently back on the table. Gib watched warily.

"That's small to what I shall do hereafter," swore Jael Bettiss.

WHEN next the mail was distributed at the general store, a dazzling stranger appeared.

She wore a cloak, an old-fashioned black coat, but its drapery did not conceal the tall perfection of her form. As for her face, it would have stirred interest and admiration in larger and more sophisticated gatherings than the knot of letter-seeking villagers. Its beauty was scornful but inviting, classic but warm, with something in it of Grecian sculpture and Oriental allure. If the nose was cruel, it was straight; if the lips were sullen, they were full; if the forehead was a suspicion low, it was white and smooth. Thick, thunder-black hair swept up from that forehead, and backward to a knot at the neck. The eyes glowed with strange, hot lights, and wherever they turned they pierced and captivated.

People moved away to let her have a clear, sweeping pathway forward to the counter. Until this stranger had entered, Ivy Hill was the loveliest person present; now she looked only modest and fresh and blond in her starched gingham, and worried to boot. As a matter of fact, Ivy Hill's insides felt cold and topsy-turvy, because she saw how fascinated was the sudden attention of John Frey.

"Is there," asked the newcomer in a deep, creamy voice, "any mail for me?"

"Wh-what name, ma'am?" asked John Frey, his brown young cheeks turning full crimson.

"Bettiss. Jael Bettiss."

He began to fumble through the sheaf of envelopes, with hands that shook. "Are you," he asked, "any relation to the old lady of that name, the one who lives in the hollow?"

"Yes, of a sort." She smiled a slow, conquering smile. "She's my—aunt. Yes. Perhaps you see the family resemblance?" Wider and wider grew the smile with which she assaulted John Frey. "If there

isn't any mail," she went on, "I would like a stamp. A one-cent stamp."

Turning to his little metal box on the shelf behind, John Frey tore a single green stamp from the sheet. His hand shook still more as he gave it to the customer and received in exchange a copper cent.

There was really nothing exceptional about the appearance of that copper cent. It looked brown and a little worn, with Lincoln's head on it, and a date—1917. But John Frey felt a sudden glow in the hand that took it, a glow that shot along his arm and into his heart. He gazed at the coin as if he had never seen its like before. And he put it slowly into his pocket, a different pocket from the one in which he usually kept change, and placed another coin in the till to pay for the stamp. Poor Ivy Hill's blue eyes grew round and downright miserable. Plainly he meant to keep that copper piece as a souvenir. But John Frey gazed only at the stranger, raptly, as though he were suddenly stunned or hypnotized.

The dark, sullen beauty drew her cloak more tightly around her, and moved regally out of the store and away toward the edge of town.

As she turned up the brush-hidden trail to the hollow, a change came. Not that her step was less young and free, her figure less queenly, her eyes dimmer or her beauty short of perfect. All these were as they had been; but her expression became set and grim, her body tense and her head high and truculent. It was as though, beneath that young loveliness, lurked an old and evil heart—which was precisely what did lurk there, it does not boot to conceal. But none saw except Gib, the black cat with soot-covered white spots, who sat on the doorstep of the ugly cottage. Jael Bettiss thrust him aside with her foot and entered.

In the kitchen she filled a tin basin from a wooden bucket, and threw into the water

a pinch of coarse green powder with an unpleasant smell. As she stirred it in with her hands, they seemed to grow skinny and harsh. Then she threw great palmfuls of the liquid into her face and over her head, and other changes came. . . .

The woman who returned to the front door, where Gib watched with a cat's apprehensive interest, was hideous old Jael Bettiss, whom all the village knew and avoided.

"He's trapped," she shrilled triumphantly. "That penny, the one I soaked for three hours in a love-philtre, trapped him the moment he touched it!" She stumped to the table, and patted the book as though it were a living, lovable thing.

"You taught me," she crooned to it. "You're winning me the love of John Frey!" She paused, and her voice grew harsh again. "Why not? I'm old and ugly and queer, but I can love, and John Frey is the handsomest man in the village!"

THE next day she went to the store again, in her new and dazzling person as a dark, beautiful girl. Gib, left alone in the hollow, turned over in his mind the things that he had heard. The new gift of human speech had brought with it, of necessity, a human quality of reasoning; but his viewpoint and his logic were as strongly feline as ever.

Jael Bettiss' dark love that lured John Frey promised no good to Gib. There would be plenty of trouble, he was inclined to think, and trouble was something that all sensible cats avoided. He was wise now, but he was weak. What could he do against danger? And his desires, as they had been since kittenhood, were food and warmth and a cozy sleeping-place, and a little respectful affection. Just now he was getting none of the four.

He thought also of Ivy Hill. She liked Gib, and often had shown it. If she won

John Frey despite the witch's plan, the two would build a house all full of creature comforts—cushions, open fires, probably fish and chopped liver. Gib's tongue caressed his soot-stained lips at the savory thought. It would be good to have a home with Ivy Hill and John Frey, if once he was quit of Jael Bettiss. . . .

But he put the thought from him. The witch had never held his love and loyalty. That went to the house in the hollow, his home since the month that he was born. Even magic had not taught him how to be rid of that cat-instinctive obsession for his own proper dwelling-place. The sinister, strife-sodden hovel would always call and claim him, would draw him back from the warmest fire, the softest bed, the most savory food in the world. Only John Howard Payne could have appreciated Gib's yearnings to the full, and he died long ago, in exile from the home he loved.

When Jael Bettiss returned, she was in a fine trembling rage. Her real self shone through the glamor of her disguise, like murky fire through a thin porcelain screen.

Gib was on the doorstep again, and tried to dodge away as she came up, but her enchantments, or something else, had made Jael Bettiss too quick even for a cat. She darted out a hand and caught him by the scruff of the neck.

"Listen to me," she said, in a voice as deadly as the trickle of poisoned water. "You understand human words. You can talk, and you can hear what I say. You can do what I say, too." She shook him, by way of emphasis. "Can't you do what I say?"

"Yes," said Gib weakly, convulsed with fear.

"All right, I have a job for you. And mind you do it well, or else——" She broke off and shook him again, letting him imagine what would happen if he disobeyed.

"Yes," said Gib again, panting for

breath in her tight grip. "What's it about?"

"It's about that little fool, Ivy Hill. She's not quite out of his heart. . . . Go to the village tonight," ordered Jael Bettiss, "and to the house of the marshal. Steal something that belongs to Ivy Hill."

"Steal something?"

"Don't echo me, as if you were a silly parrot." She let go of him, and hurried back to the book that was her constant study. "Bring me something that Ivy Hill owns and touches—and be back here with it before dawn."

Gib carried out her orders. Shortly after sundown he crept through the deepened dusk to the home of Marshal Hill. Doubly black with the soot habitually smeared upon him by Jael Bettiss, he would have been almost invisible, even had anyone been on guard against his coming. But nobody watched; the genial old man sat on the front steps, talking to his daughter.

"Say," the father teased, "isn't young Johnny Frey coming over here tonight, as usual?"

"I don't know, daddy," said Ivy Hill wretchedly.

"What's that daughter?" The marshal sounded surprised. "Is there anything gone wrong between you two young 'uns?"

"Perhaps not, but—oh, daddy, there's a new girl come to town——"

And Ivy Hill burst into tears, groping dolefully on the step beside her for her little wadded handkerchief. But she could not find it.

For Gib, stealing near, had caught it up in his mouth and was scampering away toward the edge of town, and beyond to the house in the hollow.

MEANWHILE, Jael Bettiss worked hard at a certain project of wax-modeling. Any witch, or student of witchcraft, would have known at once why she did this.

After several tries, she achieved some-

thing quite interesting and even clever—a little female figure, that actually resembled Ivy Hill.

Jael Bettiss used the wax of three candles to give it enough substance and proportion. To make it more realistic, she got some fresh, pale-gold hemp, and of this made hair, like the wig of a blond doll, for the wax head. Drops of blue ink served for eyes, and a blob of berry-juice for the red mouth. All the while she worked, Jael Bettiss was muttering and mumbling words and phrases she had gleaned from the rearward pages of her book.

When Gib brought in the handkerchief, Jael Bettiss snatched it from his mouth, with a grunt by way of thanks. With rusty scissors and coarse white thread, she fashioned for the wax figure a little dress. It happened that the handkerchief was of gingham, and so the garment made all the more striking the puppet's resemblance to Ivy Hill.

"You're a fine one!" tittered the witch, propping her finished figure against the lamp. "You'd better be scared!"

For it happened that she had worked into the waxen face an expression of terror. The blue ink of the eyes made wide round blotches, a stare of agonized fear; and the berry-juice mouth seemed to tremble, to plead shakily for mercy.

Again Jael Bettiss refreshed her memory of goetic spells by poring over the back of the book, and after that she dug from the bottom of an old pasteboard box a handful of rusty pins. She chuckled over them, so that one would think triumph already hers. Laying the puppet on its back, so that the lamplight fell full upon it, she began to recite a spell.

"I have made my wish before," she said in measured tones. "I will make it now. And there was never a day that I did not see my wish fulfilled." Simple, vague—but how many have died because those words

were spoken in a certain way over images of them?

The witch thrust a pin into the breast of the little wax figure, and drove it all the way in, with a murderous pressure of her thumb. Another pin she pushed into the head, another into an arm, another into a leg; and so on, until the gingham-clad puppet was fairly studded with transfixing pins.

"Now," she said, "we shall see what we shall see."

Morning dawned, as clear and golden as though wickedness had never been born into the world. The mysterious new paragon of beauty—not a young man of the village but mooned over her, even though she was the reputed niece and namesake of that unsavory old vagabond, Jael Bettiss—walked into the general store to make purchases. One delicate pink ear turned to the gossip of the housewives.

Wasn't it awful, they were agreeing, how poor little Ivy Hill was suddenly sick almost to death—she didn't seem to know her father or her friends. Not even Doctor Melcher could find out what was the matter with her. Strange that John Frey was not interested in her troubles; but John Frey sat behind the counter, slumped on his stool like a mud idol, and his eyes lighted up only when they spied lovely young Jael Bettiss with her market basket.

When she had heard enough, the witch left the store and went straight to the town marshal's house. There she spoke gravely and sorrowfully about how she feared for the sick girl, and was allowed to visit Ivy Hill in her bedroom. To the father and the doctor, it seemed that the patient grew stronger and felt less pain while Jael Bettiss remained to wish her a quick recovery; but, not long after this new acquaintance departed, Ivy Hill grew worse. She fainted, and recovered only to vomit.

And she vomited—pins, rusty pins. Something like that happened in old Salem Village, and earlier still in Scotland, before

the grisly cult of North Berwick was literally burned out. But Doctor Melcher, a more modern scholar, had never seen or heard of anything remotely resembling Ivy Hill's disorder.

So it went, for three full days. Gib, too, heard the doleful gossip as he slunk around the village to hunt for food and to avoid Jael Bettiss, who did not like him near when she did magic. Ivy Hill was dying, and he mourned her, as for the boons of fish and fire and cushions and petting that might have been his. He knew, too, that he was responsible for her doom and his loss—that handkerchief that he had stolen had helped Jael Bettiss to direct her spells.

But philosophy came again to his aid. If Ivy Hill died, she died. Anyway, he had never been given the chance to live as her pensioner and pet. He was not even sure that he would have taken the chance—thinking of it, he felt strong, accustomed clamps upon his heart. The house in the hollow was his home forever. Elsewhere he'd be an exile.

Nothing would ever root it out of his feline soul.

ON THE evening of the third day, witch and cat faced each other across the table-top in the old house in the hollow.

"They've talked loud enough to make his dull ears hear," grumbled the fearful old woman—with none but Gib to see her, she had washed away the disguising enchantment that, though so full of lure, seemed to be a burden upon her. "John Frey has agreed to take Ivy Hill out in his automobile. The doctor thinks that the fresh air, and John Frey's company, will make her feel better—but it won't. It's too late. She'll never return from that drive."

She took up the pin-pierced wax image of her rival, rose and started toward the kitchen.

"What are you going to do?" Gib forced himself to ask.

"Do?" repeated Jael Bettiss, smiling murderously. "I'm going to put an end to that baby-faced chit—but why are you so curious? Get out, with your prying!"

And, snarling curses and striking with her claw-like hands, she made him spring down from his chair and run out of the house. The door slammed, and he crouched in some brambles and watched. No sound, and at the half-blinded windows no movement; but, after a time, smoke began to coil upward from the chimney. Its first puffs were dark and greasy-looking. Then it turned dull gray, then white, then blue as indigo. Finally it vanished altogether.

When Jael Bettiss opened the door and came out, she was once more in the semblance of a beautiful dark girl. Yet Gib recognized a greater terror about her than ever before.

"You be gone from here when I get back," she said to him.

"Gone?" stammered Gib, his little heart turning cold. "What do you mean?"

She stooped above him, like a threatening bird of prey.

"You be gone," she repeated. "If I ever see you again, I'll kill you—or I'll make my new husband kill you."

He still could not believe her. He shrank back, and his eyes turned mournfully to the old house that was the only thing he loved.

"You're the only witness to the things I've done," Jael Bettiss continued. "Nobody would believe their ears if a cat started telling tales, but anyway, I don't want any trace of you around. If you leave, they'll forget that I used to be a witch. So run!"

She turned away. Her mutterings were now only her thoughts aloud:

"If my magic works—and it always works—that cat will find itself idling

around through the hill road to the other side of the quarry. John Frey will stop there. And so will Ivy Hill—forever.”

Drawing her cloak around her, she stalked purposefully toward the old quarry behind the house.

LEFT by himself, Gib lowered his lids and let his yellow eyes grow dim and deep with thought. His shrewd beast's mind pawed and probed at this final wonder and danger that faced him and John Frey and Ivy Hill.

He must run away if he would live. The witch's house in the hollow, that had never welcomed him, now threatened him. No more basking on the doorstep, no more ambushing wood-mice among the brambles, no more dozing by the kitchen fire. Nothing for Gib henceforth but strange, forbidding wilderness, and scavenger's food, and no shelter, not on the coldest night. The village? But his only two friends, John Frey and Ivy Hill, were being taken from him by the magic of Jael Bettiss and her book. . . .

That book had done this. That book must undo it. There was no time to lose.

The door was not quite latched, and he nosed it open, despite the groans of its hinges. Hurrying in, he sprang up on the table.

It was gloomy in that tree-invested house, even for Gib's sharp eyes. Therefore, in a trembling fear almost too big for his little body, he spoke a word that Jael Bettiss had spoken, on her first night of power. As had happened then, so it happened now; the dark lamp glowed alight.

Gib pawed at the closed book, and contrived to lift its cover. Pressing it open with one front foot, with the other he painstakingly turned leaves, more leaves, and more yet. Finally he came to the page he wanted.

Not that he could read; and, in any case, the characters were strange in their shapes

and combinations. Yet, if one looked long enough and levelly enough—even though one were a cat, and afraid—they made sense, conveyed intelligence.

And so into the mind of Gib, beating down his fears, there stole a phrase:

Beware of mirrors. . . .

So that was why Jael Bettiss never kept a mirror—not even now, when she could assume such dazzling beauty.

Beware of mirrors, the book said to Gib, *for they declare the truth, and truth is fatal to sorcery. Beware, also, of crosses, which defeat all spells. . . .*

That was definite inspiration. He moved back from the book, and let it snap shut. Then, pushing with head and paws, he coaxed it to the edge of the table and let it fall. Jumping down after it, he caught a corner of the book in his teeth and dragged it to the door, more like a retriever than a cat. When he got it into the yard, into a place where the earth was soft, he dug furiously until he had made a hole big enough to contain the volume. Then, thrusting it in, he covered it up.

Nor was that all his effort, so far as the book was concerned. He trotted a little way off to where lay some dry, tough twigs under the cypress trees. To the little grave he bore first one, then another of these, and laid them across each other, in the form of an X. He pressed them well into the earth, so that they would be hard to disturb. Perhaps he would keep an eye on that spot henceforth, after he had done the rest of the things in his mind, to see that the cross remained. And, though he acted thus only by chance reasoning, all the demonologists, even the Reverend Montague Summers, would have nodded approval. Is this not the way to foil the black wisdom of the *Grand Albert*? Did not Prospero thus inter his grimoires, in the fifth act of *The Tempest*?

Now back to the house once more, and into the kitchen. It was even darker than

the parlor, but Gib could make out a basin on a stool by the moldy wall, and smelled an ugly pungency—Jael Bettiss had left her mixture of powdered water after last washing away her burden of false beauty.

Gib's feline nature rebelled at a wetting; his experience of witchcraft bade him be wary, but he rose on his hind legs and with his forepaws dragged at the basin's edge. It tipped and toppled. The noisome fluid drenched him. Wheeling, he ran back into the parlor, but paused on the doorstep. He spoke two more words that he remembered from Jael Bettiss. The lamp went out again.

And now he dashed around the house and through the brambles and to the quarry beyond.

It lay amid uninhabited wooded hills, a wide excavation from which had once been quarried all the stones for the village houses and pavements. Now it was full of water, from many thaws and torrents. Almost at its lip was parked John Frey's touring-car, with the top down, and beside it he lolled, slack-faced and dreamy. At his side, cloak-draped and enigmatically queenly, was Jael Bettiss, her back to the quarry, never more terrible or handsome. John Frey's eyes were fixed dreamily upon her, and her eyes were fixed commandingly on the figure in the front seat of the car—a slumped, defeated figure, hard to recognize as poor sick Ivy Hill.

"Can you think of no way to end all this pain, Miss Ivy?" the witch was asking. Though she did not stir, nor glance behind her, it was as though she had gestured toward the great quarry-pit, full to unknown depths with black, still water. The sun, at the very point of setting, made angry red lights on the surface of that stagnant pond.

"Go away," sobbed Ivy Hill, afraid without knowing why. "Please, please!"

"I'm only trying to help," said Jael Bettiss. "Isn't that so, John?"

"That's so, Ivy," agreed John, like a

little boy who is prompted to an unfamiliar recitation. "She's only trying to help."

Gib, moving silently as fate, crept to the back of the car. None of the three human beings, so intent upon each other, saw him.

"Get out of the car," persisted Jael Bettiss. "Get out, and look into the water. You will forget your pain."

"Yes, yes," chimed in John Frey, mechanically. "You will forget your pain."

GIB scrambled stealthily to the running-board, then over the side of the car and into the rear seat. He found what he had hoped to find. Ivy Hill's purse—and open.

He pushed his nose into it. Tucked into a little side-pocket was a hard, flat rectangle, about the size and shape of a visiting-card. All normal girls carry mirrors in their purses—all mirrors show the truth: Gib clamped the edge with his mouth, and struggled to drag the thing free.

"Miss Ivy," Jael Bettiss was commanding, "get out of this car, and come and look into the water of the quarry."

No doubt what would happen if once Ivy Hill should gaze into that shiny black abyss; but she bowed her head, in agreement or defeat, and began slowly to push aside the catch of the door.

Now or never, thought Gib. He made a little noise in his throat, and sprang up on the side of the car next to Jael Bettiss. His black-stained face and yellow eyes were not a foot from her.

She alone saw him; Ivy Hill was too sick, John Frey too dull. "What are you doing here?" she snarled, like a bigger and fiercer cat than he; but he moved closer still, holding up the oblong in his teeth. Its back was uppermost, covered with imitation leather, and hid the real nature of it. Jael Bettiss was mystified, for once in her relationship with Gib. She took the thing from him, turned it over, and saw a reflection.

She screamed.

The other two looked up, horrified through their stupor. The scream that Jael Bettiss uttered was not deep and rich and young; it was the wild, cracked cry of a terrified old woman.

"I don't look like that," she choked out, and drew back from the car. "Not old—ugly——"

Gib sprang at her face. With all four claw-bristling feet he seized and clung to her. Again Jael Bettiss screamed, flung up her hands, and tore him away from his hold; but his soggy fur had smeared the powdered water upon her face and head.

Though he fell to earth, Gib twisted in midair and landed upright. He had one glimpse of his enemy. Jael Bettiss, no mistake—but a Jael Bettiss with hooked beak, rheumy eyes, hideous wry mouth and yellow chisel teeth—Jael Bettiss exposed for what she was, stripped of her lying mask of beauty!

And she drew back a whole staggering step. Rocks were just behind her. Gib saw, and flung himself. Like a flash he clawed his way up her cloak, and with both forepaws ripped at the ugliness he had betrayed. He struck for his home that was forbidden him — Marco Bozzaris never strove harder for Greece, nor Stonewall Jackson for Virginia.

Jael Bettiss screamed yet again, a scream loud and full of horror. Her feet had slipped on the edge of the abyss. She flung out her arms, the cloak flapped from them like frantic wings. She fell, and Gib fell with her, still tearing and fighting.

The waters of the quarry closed over them both.

GIB thought that it was a long way back to the surface, and a longer way to shore. But he got there, and scrambled out with the help of projecting rocks. He shook his drenched body, climbed back into the car and sat upon the rear seat. At least

Jael Bettiss would no longer drive him from the home he loved. He'd find food some way, and take it back there each day to eat. . . .

With tongue and paws he began to rearrange his sodden fur.

John Frey, clear-eyed and wide awake, was leaning in and talking to Ivy Hill. As for her, she sat up straight, as though she had never known a moment of sickness.

"But just what did happen?" she was asking.

John Frey shook his head, though all the stupidity was gone from his face and manner. "I don't quite remember. I seem to have wakened from a dream. But are you all right, darling?"

"Yes, I'm all right." She gazed toward the quarry, and the black water that had already subsided above what it had swallowed. Her eyes were puzzled, but not frightened. "I was dreaming, too," she said. "Let's not bother about it."

She lifted her gaze, and cried out with joy. "There's that old house that daddy owns. Isn't it interesting?"

John Frey looked, too. "Yes. The old witch has gone away—I seem to have heard she did."

Ivy Hill was smiling with excitement. "Then I have an inspiration. Let's get daddy to give it to us. And we'll paint it over and fix it up, and then——" She broke off, with a cry of delight. "I declare, there's a cat in the car with me!"

It was the first she had known of Gib's presence.

John Frey stared at Gib. He seemed to have wakened only the moment before. "Yes, and isn't he a thin one? But he'll be pretty when he gets through cleaning himself. I think I see a white shirt-front."

Ivy Hill put out a hand and scratched Gib behind the ear. "He's bringing us good luck, I think. John, let's take him to live with us when we have the house fixed up and move in."

"Why not?" asked her lover. He was gazing at Gib. "He looks as if he was getting ready to speak."

But Gib was not getting ready to speak. The power of speech was gone from him, along with Jael Bettiss and her enchantments. But he understood, in a measure,

what was being said about him and the house in the hollow. There would be new life there, joyful and friendly this time. And he would be a part of it, forever, and of his loved home.

He could only purr to show his relief and gratitude.

The Sorcerer's Apprentice

THE weird legend of the Sorcerer's Apprentice, known to the modern world by the poetry of Goethe and the music of Dukas, was related by Lucian in the *Philopseudes*. Here is the legend, in Sir Thomas More's translation:

When a certain Eucrates saw an Egyptian magician named Pancrates do many marvels, he gradually insinuated himself into his friendship until he learned nearly all his secrets. At last the magician persuaded him to leave all his servants in Memphis and accompany him alone, for they would have no lack of servants; and from that time (Eucrates said) thus we lived.

"When we came into an inn, he taking the bolt of the door, or a broom or bar, and clothing it, spoke a charm to it, and to enable it to go, and in all things to resemble a man. The thing going forth, would draw water, provide, and dress our supper, and diligently wait and attend upon us. After his business was done, he pronounced another charm, and turned the broom into a broom again, and the pestle into a pestle. This was an art which, though I labored much, I could not learn

of him. For this was a mystery which he denied me, though in all things else he were open.

"One day, hiding myself in a dark corner, I overheard his charm, which was but three syllables. He having appointed the bolt its business, went into the market.

"The next day, he having some other appointment in the market, I taking the pestle and appareling it, in like manner pronounced the syllables, and bid it fetch me some water. When it had brought me a basin full, 'It is enough,' I said, 'fetch no more, but be a pestle again.' But it was so far from obeying me, that it ceased not to fetch water till it had overflowed the room. I, much troubled at the accident, and fearing lest if Pancrates return (as he did) he would be much displeased, took an ax and cut the pestle in two. Then both parts taking several buckets fetched water. And instead of one, I had two servants.

"In the meantime Pancrates came in, and perceiving what had happened, transformed them into wood again, as they were before I uttered the spell. Shortly after he secretly left me, and vanishing went I know not whither."

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The Song of the Slaves

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

What was that song that sounded through the night, filled with sinister warning?—a tale of the slave trade

GENDER paused at the top of the bald rise, mopped his streaming red forehead beneath the wide hat-brim, and gazed backward at his forty-nine captives. Naked and black, they shuffled upward from the narrow, ancient slave trail through the jungle. Forty-nine men, seized by Gender's own hand and collared to a single long chain, destined for his own plantation across the sea. . . . Gender grinned in his lean, drooping mustache, a mirthless grin of greedy triumph.

For years he had dreamed and planned for this adventure, as other men dream and plan for European tours, holy pilgrimages, or returns to beloved birthplaces. He had told himself that it was intensely practical and profitable. Slaves passed through so many hands—the raider, the caravaner, the seashore factor, the slaver captain, the dealer in New Orleans or Havana or at home in Charleston. Each greedy hand clutched a rich profit, and all profits must come eventually from the price paid by the planter. But he, Gender, had come to Africa himself, in his own ship; with a dozen staunch ruffians from Benguela he had penetrated the Bihé-Bailundu country, had sacked a village and taken these forty-nine upstanding natives between dark and dawn. A single neck-shackle on his long chain remained empty, and he might fill even that before he came to his ship. By the Lord, he was making money this way, fairly coining it—and

money was worth the making, to a Charleston planter in 1853.

So he reasoned, and so he actually believed, but the real joy to him was hidden in the darkest nook of his heart. He had conceived the raider-plan because of a nature that fed on savagery and mastery. A man less fierce and cruel might have been satisfied with hunting lions or elephants, but Gender must hunt men. As a matter of fact, the money made or saved by the journey would be little, if it was anything. The satisfaction would be tremendous. He would broaden his thick chest each day as he gazed out over his lands and saw there his slaves hoeing sea-shore cotton or pruning indigo; his forty-nine slaves, caught and shipped and trained by his own big, hard hands, more indicative of assured conquest than all the horned or fanged heads that ever passed through the shops of all the taxidermists.

Something hummed in his ears, like a rhythmic swarm of bees. Men were murmuring a song under their breath. It was the long string of pinch-faced slaves. Gender stared at them, and mouthed one of the curses he always kept at tongue's end.

"Silva!" he called.

The lanky Portuguese who strode free at the head of the file turned aside and stood before Gender. "Patrao?" he inquired respectfully, smiling teeth gleaming in his walnut face.



"These are the bones of slaves. They gleam from the abyss."

"What are those men singing?" demanded Gender. "I didn't think they had anything to sing about."

"A slave song, *Patrao*," Silva's tapering hand, with the silver bracelet at its wrist, made a graceful gesture of dismissal. "It is nothing. One of the things that natives make up and sing as they go."

GENDER struck his boot with his coiled whip of hippopotamus hide. The afternoon sun, sliding down toward the shaggy jungle-tops, kindled harsh pale lights in his narrow blue eyes. "How does the song go?" he persisted.

The two fell into step beside the caravan as, urged by a dozen red-capped drivers, it shambled along the trail. "It is only a slave song, *patrao*," said Silva once again. "It means something like this: 'Though you carry me away in chains, I am free when I die. Back will I come to bewitch and kill you.'"

Gender's heavy body seemed to swell, and his eyes grew narrower and paler. "So they sing that, hmm?" He swore again. "Listen to that!"

The unhappy procession had taken up a brief, staccato refrain:

"*Hailowa—Genda! Haipana—Genda!*"

"Genda, that's my name," snarled the planter. "They're singing about me, aren't they?"

Silva made another fluid gesture, but Gender flourished his whip under the nose of the Portuguese. "Don't you try to shrug me off. I'm not a child, to be talked around like this. What are they singing about me?"

"Nothing of consequence, *patrao*," Silva made haste to reassure him. "It might be to say: 'I will bewitch Gender, I will kill Gender.'"

"They threaten me, do they?" Gender's broad face took on a deeper flush. He ran at the line of chained black men. With all the strength of his arm he slashed and

swung with the whip. The song broke up into wretched howls of pain.

"I'll give you a music lesson!" he raged, and flogged his way up and down the procession until he swayed and dripped sweat with the exertion.

But as he turned away, it struck up again:

"*Hailowa—Genda! Haipana—Genda!*"

Whirling back, he resumed the rain of blows. Silva, rushing up to second him, also whipped the slaves and execrated them in their own tongue. But when both were tired, the flayed captives began to sing once more, softly but stubbornly, the same chant.

"Let them whine," panted Gender at last. "A song never killed anybody."

Silva grinned nervously. "Of course not, *patrao*. That is only an idiotic native belief."

"You mean, they think that a song will kill?"

"That, and more. They say that if they sing together, think together of one hate, all their thoughts and hates will become a solid strength—will strike and punish for them."

"Nonsense!" exploded Gender.

But when they made camp that night, Gender slept only in troubled snatches, and his dreams were of a song that grew deeper, heavier, until it became visible as a dark, dense cloud that overwhelmed him.

THE ship that Gender had engaged for the expedition lay in a swampy estuary, far from any coastal town, and the dawn by which he loaded his goods aboard was strangely fiery and forbidding. Dunlapp, the old slaver-captain that commanded for him, met him in the cabin.

"All ready, sir?" he asked Gender. "We can sail with the tide. Plenty of room in the hold for that handful you brought. I'll tell the men to strike off those irons."

"On the contrary," said Gender, "tell

the men to put manacles on the hands of each slave."

Dunlapp gazed in astonishment at his employer. "But that's bad for blacks, Mr. Gender. They get sick in chains, won't eat their food. Sometimes they die."

"I pay you well, Captain," Gender rumbled, "but not to advise me. Listen to those heathen."

Dunlapp listened. A moan of music wafted in to them.

"They've sung that cursed song about me all the way to the coast," Gender told him. "They know I hate it—I've whipped them day after day—but they keep it up. No chains come off until they hush their noise."

Dunlapp bowed acquiescence and walked out to give orders. Later, as they put out to sea, he rejoined Gender on the after deck.

"They do seem stubborn about their singing," he observed.

"I've heard it said," Gender replied, "that they sing together because they think many voices and hearts give power to hate, or to other feelings." He scowled. "Pagan fantasy!"

Dunlapp stared overside, at white gulls just above the wave-tips. "There may be a tithe of truth in that belief, Mr. Gender; sometimes there is in the faith of wild people. Hark ye, I've seen a good fifteen hundred Mohammedans praying at once, in the Barbary countries. When they bowed down, the touch of all those heads to the ground banged like the fall of a heavy rock. And when they straightened, the motion of their garments made a swish like the gust of a gale. I couldn't help but think that their prayer had force."

"More heathen foolishness," snapped Gender, and his lips drew tight.

"Well, in Christian lands we have examples, sir," Dunlapp pursued. "For instance, a mob will grow angry and burn or hang someone. Would a single man

do that? Would any single man of the mob do it? No, but together their hate and resolution becomes——"

"Not the same thing at all," ruled Gender harshly. "Suppose we change the subject."

On the following afternoon, a white sail crept above the horizon behind them. At the masthead gleamed a little blotch of color. Captain Dunlapp squinted through a telescope, and barked a sailorly oath.

"A British ship-of-war," he announced, "and coming after us."

"Well?" said Gender.

"Don't you understand, sir? England is sworn to stamp out the slave trade. If they catch us with this cargo, it'll be the end of us." A little later, he groaned apprehensively. "They're overtaking us. There's their signal, for us to lay to and wait for them. Shall we do it, sir?"

Gender shook his head violently. "Not we! Show them our heels, Captain."

"They'll catch us. They are sailing three feet to our two."

"Not before dark," said Gender. "When dark comes, we'll contrive to lessen our embarrassment."

And so the slaver fled, with the Britisher in pursuit. Within an hour, the sun was at the horizon, and Gender smiled grimly in his mustache.

"It'll be dark within minutes," he said to Dunlapp. "As soon as you feel they can't make out our actions by glass, get those slaves on deck."

In the dusk the forty-nine naked prisoners stood in a line along the bulwark. For all their chained necks and wrists, they neither stood nor gazed in a servile manner. One of them began to sing and the others joined, in the song of the slave trail:

"Hailowa—Genda! Haipana—Genda!"

"Sing on," Gender snapped briefly, and moved to the end of the line that was near the bow. Here dangled the one empty

collar, and he seized it in his hand. Bending over the bulwark, he clamped it shut upon something—the ring of a heavy spare anchor, that swung there upon a swivel-hook. Again he turned, and eyed the line of dark singers.

"Have a bath to cool your spirits," he jeered, and spun the handle of the swivel-hook.

The anchor fell. The nearest slave jerked over with it, and the next and the next. Others saw, screamed, and tried to brace themselves against doom; but their comrades that had already gone overside were too much weight for them. Quickly, one after another, the captives whipped from the deck and splashed into the sea. Gender leaned over and watched the last of them as he sank.

"Gad, sir!" exclaimed Dunlapp hoarsely.

Gender faced him almost threateningly.

"What else to do, himm? You yourself said that we could hope for no mercy from the British."

THE night passed by, and by the first gray light the British ship was revealed almost upon them. A megaphoned voice hailed them; then a shot hurtled across their bows. At Gender's smug nod, Dunlapp ordered his men to lay to. A boat put out from the pursuer, and shortly a British officer and four marines swung themselves aboard.

Bowing in mock reverence, Gender bade the party search. They did so, and remounted the deck crestfallen.

"Now, sir," Gender addressed the officer, "don't you think that you owe me an apology?"

The Englishman turned pale. He was a lean, sharp-featured man with strong, white teeth. "I can't pay what I owe you," he said with deadly softness. "I find no slaves, but I smell them. They were aboard this vessel within the past twelve hours."

"And where are they now?" teased Gender.

"We both know where they are," was the reply. "If I could prove in a court of law what I know in my heart, you would sail back to England with me. Most of the way you would hang from my yards by your thumbs."

"You wear out your welcome, sir," Gender told him.

"I am going. But I have provided myself with your name and that of your home city. From here I go to Madeira, where I will cross a packet bound west for Savannah. That packet will bear with it a letter to a friend of mine in Charleston, and your neighbors shall hear what happened on this ship of yours."

"You will stun slave-owners with a story of slaves?" inquired Gender, with what he considered silky good-humor.

"It is one thing to put men to work in cotton fields, another to tear them from their homes, crowd them chained aboard a stinking ship, and drown them to escape merited punishment." The officer spat on the deck. "Good day, butcher. I say, all Charleston shall hear of you."

GENDER'S plantation occupied a great, bluff-rimmed island at the mouth of a river, looking out toward the Atlantic. Ordinarily that island would be called beautiful, even by those most exacting followers of Chateaubriand and Rousseau; but, on his first night at home again, Gender hated the fields, the house, the environs of fresh and salt water.

His home, on a seaward jut, resounded to his grumbled curses as he called for supper and ate heavily but without relish. Once he vowed, in a voice that quivered with rage, never to go to Charleston again.

At that, he would do well to stay away for a time. The British officer had been as good as his promise, and all the town had heard of Gender's journey to Africa and

what he had done there. With a perverse squeamishness beyond Gender's understanding, the hearers were filled with disgust instead of admiration. Captain Hogue had refused to drink with him at the Jefferson House. His oldest friend, Mr. Lloyd Davis of Davis Township, had crossed the street to avoid meeting him. Even the Reverend Doctor Lockin had turned coldly away as he passed, and it was said that a sermon was forthcoming at Doctor Lockin's church attacking despoilers and abductors of defenseless people.

What was the matter with everybody? savagely demanded Gender of himself; these men who snubbed and avoided him were slave-holders. Some of them, it was quite possible, even held slaves fresh from raided villages under the Equator. Unfair! . . . Yet he could not but feel the animosity of many hearts, chafing and weighing upon his spirit.

"Brutus," he addressed the slave that cleared the table, "do you believe that hate can take form?"

"Hate, Marsa?" The sooty face was solemnly respectful.

"Yes. Hate, of many people together." Gender knew he should not confide too much in a slave, and chose his words carefully. "Suppose a lot of people hated the same thing, maybe they sang a song about it——"

"Oh, yes, Marsa," Brutus nodded. "I heah 'bout dat, from ole gran-pappy when I was little. He bin in Affiky, he says many times day sing somebody to deff."

"Sing somebody to death?" repeated Gender. "How?"

"Dey sing dat dey kill him. Afta while, maybe plenty days, he die——"

"Shut up, you black rascal!" Gender sprang from his chair and clutched at a bottle. "You've heard about this somewhere, and you dare to taunt me!"

Brutus darted from the room, mortally frightened. Gender almost pursued, but

thought better and tramped into his parlor. The big, brown-paneled room seemed to give back a heavier echo of his feet. The windows were filled with the early darkness, and a hanging lamp threw rays into the corners.

On the center table lay some mail, a folded newspaper and a letter. Gender poured whisky from a decanter, stirred in spring water, and dropped into a chair. First he opened the letter.

"Stirling Manor," said the return address at the top of the page. Gender's heart twitched. Evelyn Stirling, he had hopes of her . . . but this was written in a masculine hand, strong and hasty.

"Sir:

"Circumstances that have come to my knowledge compel me, as a matter of duty, to command that you discontinue your attentions to my daughter."

Gender's eyes took on the pale tint of rage. One more result of the Britisher's letter, he made no doubt.

"I have desired her to hold no further communication with you, and I have been sufficiently explicit to convince her how unworthy you are of her esteem and attention. It is hardly necessary for me to give you the reasons which have induced me to form this judgment, and I add only that nothing you can say or do will alter it.

"Your obedient servant,

"JUDGE FORRESTER STIRLING."

Gender hastily swigged a portion of his drink, and crushed the paper in his hand. So that was the judge's interfering way—it sounded as though he had copied it from a complete letter-writer for heavy fathers. He, Gender, began to form a reply in his mind:

"Sir:

"Your unfeeling and arbitrary letter admits of but one response. As a gentleman grossly misused, I demand satisfaction on the field

of honor. Arrangements I place in the hands of . . ."

By what friend should he forward that challenge? It seemed that he was mighty short of friends just now. He sipped more whisky and water, and tore the wrappings of the newspaper.

It was a Massachusetts publication, and toward the bottom of the first page was a heavy cross of ink, to call attention to one item. A poem, evidently, in four-line stanzas. Its title signified nothing—*The Witnesses*. Author, Henry W. Longfellow; Gender identified him vaguely as a scrawler of Abolitionist doggerel. Why was this poem recommended to a southern planter?

In Ocean's wide domains,
Half buried in the sands,
Lie skeletons in chains,
With shackled feet and hands.

Once again the reader swore, but the oath quavered on his lips. His eye moved to a stanza farther down the column:

These are the bones of Slaves;
They gleam from the abyss;
They cry, from yawning waves . . .

But it seemed to Gender that he heard, rather than read, what that cry was.

He sprang to his feet, paper and glass falling from his hands. His thin lips drew apart, his ears strained. The sound was faint, but unmistakable—many voices singing.

The Negroes in his cabins? But no Negro on his plantation would know that song. The chanting refrain began:

"Hailowa—Genda! Haipana—Genda!"

The planter's lean mustaches bristled tigerishly. This would surely be the refined extremity of his persecution, this chanting of a weird song under his window-sill. It was louder now. *I will be-*

witch, I will kill—but who would know that fierce mockery of him?

The crew of his ship, of course; they had heard it on the writhing lips of the captives, at the very moment of their destruction. And when the ship docked in Charleston, with no profit to show, Gender had been none too kindly in paying them off.

Those unsavory mariners must have been piqued. They had followed him, then, were setting up this vicious serenade.

Gender stepped quickly around the table and toward the window. He flung up the sash with a violence that almost shattered the glass, and leaned savagely out.

On that instant the song stopped, and Gender could see only the seaward slope of his land, down to the lip of the bluff that overhung the water. Beyond that stretched an expanse of waves, patchily agleam under a great buckskin-colored moon, that even now stirred the murmurous tide at the foot of the bluff. Here were no trees, no brush even, to hide pranksters. The singers, now silent, must be in a boat under the shelter of the bluff.

GENDER strode from the room, fairly tore open a door, and made heavy haste toward the sea. He paused, on the lip of the bluff. Nothing was to be seen, beneath him or farther out. The mockers, if they had been here, had already fled. He growled, glared, and tramped back to his house. He entered the parlor once more, drew down the sash, and sought his chair again. Choosing another glass, he began once more to mix whisky and water. But he stopped in the middle of his pouring.

There it was again, the song he knew; and closer.

He rose, took a step in the direction of the window, then thought better of it. He had warned his visitors by one sortie, and they had hidden. Why not let them come

close, and suffer the violence he ached to pour out on some living thing?

He moved, not to the window, but to a mantelpiece opposite. From a box of dark, polished wood he lifted a pistol, then another. They were duelling weapons, handsomely made, with hair-triggers; and Gender was a dead shot. With orderly swiftness he poured in glazed powder from a flask, rammed down two leaden bullets, and laid percussion caps upon the touch-holes. Returning, he placed the weapons on his center table, then stood on tiptoe to extinguish the hanging lamp. A single light remained in the room, a candle by the door, and this he carried to the window, placing it on a bracket there. Moving into the gloomy center of the parlor, he sat in his chair and took a pistol in either hand.

The song was louder now, lifted by many voices:

"Hailowa—Genda! Haipana—Genda!"

Undoubtedly the choristers had come to land by now, had gained the top of the bluff. They could be seen, Gender was sure, from the window. He felt perspiration on his brow, and lifted a sleeve to blot it. Trying to scare him, hmm? Singing about witchcraft and killing? Well, he'd show them who was the killer.

The singing had drawn close, was just outside. Odd how the sailors, or whoever they were, had learned that chant so well! It recalled to his mind the slave trail, the jungle, the long procession of crooning prisoners. But here was no time for idle reverie on vanished scenes. Silence had fallen again, and he could only divine the presence, just outside, of many creatures.

Scratch-scratch-scratch; it sounded like the stealthy creeping of a snake over rough lumber. That scratching resounded from the window where something stole into view in the candlelight. Gender fixed his eyes there, and his pistols lifted their muzzles.

The palm of a hand, as gray as a fish, laid itself on the glass. It was wet; Gender could see the trickle of water descending along the pane. Something clinked, almost musically. Another hand moved into position beside it, and between the two swung links of chain.

This was an elaborately devilish joke, thought Gender, in an ecstasy of rage. Even the chains, to lend reality . . . and as he stared he knew, in a split moment of terror that stirred his flesh on his bones, that it was no joke after all.

A face had moved into the range of the candlelight, pressing close to the pane between the two palms.

It was darker than those palms, of a dirty, slaty deadness of color. But it was not dead, not with those dull, intent eyes that moved slowly in their blistery sockets . . . not dead, though it was foully wet, and its thick lips hung slackly open, and seaweed lay plastered upon the cheeks, even though the flat nostrils showed crumbled and gnawed away, as if by fish. The eyes quested here and there across the floor and walls of the parlor. They came to rest, gazing full into the face of Gender.

He felt as though stale sea-water had trickled upon him, but his right hand abode steady as a gun-rest. He took aim and fired.

The glass crashed loudly, and fell in shattering flakes to the floor beneath the sill.

Gender was on his feet, moving forward, dropping the empty pistol on the table and whipping the loaded one into his right hand. Two leaping strides took him almost to the window, before he reeled backward.

The face had not fallen. It stared at him, a scant yard away. Between the dull, living eyes showed a round black hole, where the bullet had gone in. But the thing stood unflinchingly, somehow serenely. Its two wet hands moved slowly, method-

ically, to pluck away the jagged remains of the glass.

GENDER rocked where he stood, unable for the moment to command his body to retreat. The shoulders beneath the face heightened. They were bare and wet and deadly dusky, and they clinked the collar-shackle beneath the lax chin. Two hands stole into the room, their fish-colored palms opening toward Gender.

He screamed, and at last he ran. As he turned his back, the singing began yet again, loud and horribly jaunty—not at all as the miserable slaves had sung it. He gained the seaward door, drew it open, and looked full into a gathering of black, wet figures, with chains festooned among them, awaiting him. Again he screamed, and tried to push the door shut.

He could not. A hand was braced against the edge of the panel—many hands. The wood fringed itself with gleaming black fingers. Gender let go the knob, whirled to flee into the house. Something caught the back of his coat, something he dared not identify. In struggling loose, he spun through the doorway and into the moonlit open.

Figures surrounded him, black, naked, wet figures; dead as to sunken faces and flaccid muscles, but horribly alive as to eyes and trembling hands and slack mouths that formed the strange primitive words of the song; separate, yet strung together with a great chain and collar-shackles, like an awful fish on the gigantic line of some demon-angler. All this Gender saw in a rocking, moon-washed moment, while he choked and retched at a dreadful odor of death, thick as fog.

Still he tried to run, but they were moving around him in a weaving crescent, cutting off his retreat toward the plantation. Hands extended toward him, manacled and dripping. His only will was to escape the touch of those sodden fingers, and one way was open—the way to the sea.

He ran toward the brink of the bluff. From its top he would leap, dive and swim away. But they pursued, overtook, surrounded him. He remembered that he held a loaded pistol, and fired into their black midst. It had no effect. He might have known that it would have no effect.

Something was clutching for him. A great, inhuman talon? No, it was an open collar of metal, with a length of chain to it, a collar that had once clamped to an anchor, dragging down to ocean's depths a line of shackled men. It gaped at him, held forth by many dripping hands. He tried to dodge, but it darted around his throat, shut with a ringing snap. Was it cold . . . or scalding hot? He knew, with horror vividly etching the knowledge into his heart, that he was one at last with the great chained procession.

"Hailowa—Genda! Haipana—Genda!"

He found his voice. "No, no!" he pleaded. "No, in the name of—"

But he could not say the name of God. And the throng suddenly moved explosively, concertedly, to the edge of the bluff.

A single wailing cry from all those dead throats, and they dived into the waves below.

Gender did not feel the clutch and jerk of the chain that dragged him alone. He did not even feel the water as it closed over his head.



Frank Gruber's up to the minute Miracle

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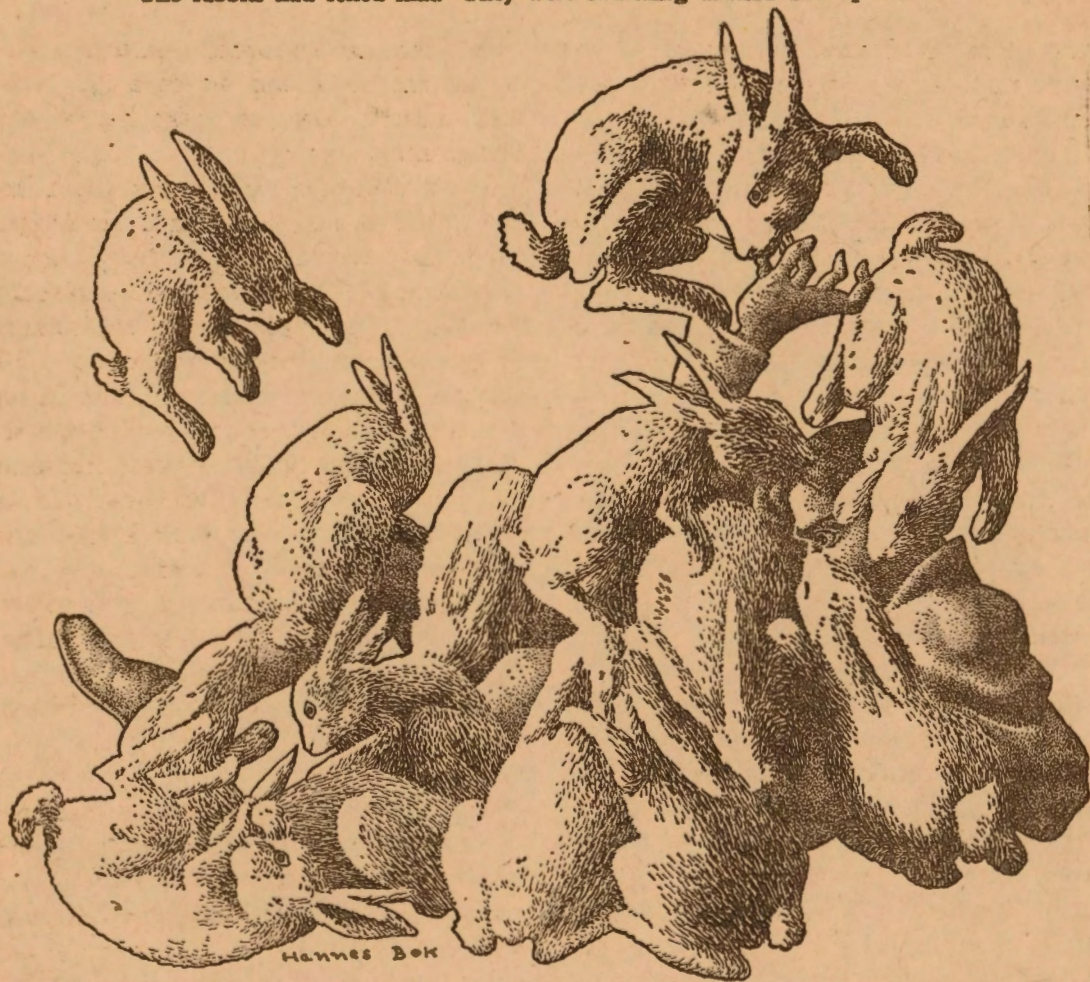


An adventure of a **PROFESSIONAL CORPSE**
—whose livelihood is **dying**

by **H. BEDFORD-JONES**

The Gentle Werewolf by **SEABURY QUINN**

'The rabbits had felled him. They were swarming around and upon him.'



The Dreadful Rabbits

By GANS T. FIELD

*One hardly thinks of rabbits as murderous wild beasts, and yet—
The author of "The Witch's Cat" and "Fearful
Rock" has a theory.*

"... there are a hundred things one has to know, which we understand and you don't, as yet. I mean passwords, and signs, and sayings which have power and effect, and plants you carry in your pocket, and verses you repeat, and dodges and tricks you practise; all simple enough when you know them, but they've got to be known. . . ."

—Kenneth Grahame,

The Wind in the Willows

AT A POINT about four miles out of Crispinville, a lean-looking rabbit, with black-and-white smudgings on the gray of his ears and long hind legs, came flopping out on the pavement and paused in full way of the car. Morgan Pitts put on the brakes, drew out a handkerchief and mopped the summer

heat from his flushed, seamed brow. He said, with casual courtesy: "Howdy, Mister Rabbit!"

The animal immediately finished its crossing of the road, and sat up in a tussock of grass, gazing while Pitts started the car again. Judge Keith Hilary Pursuivant, big and blond and bespectacled, returned the gaze of those bulging black eyes. They seemed to have a green flash in them. He made no remark, but appeared deeply interested, and he was. He had come all the way to Crispinville for the very purpose of learning about the custom of rabbit-greeting.

After they rounded a curve and left the little town well out of sight, Judge Pursuivant ventured his query:

"How old is that custom of speaking to rabbits, Mr. Pitts? And how did it start?"

Pitts scratched his grizzled head. He was little and spry-looking, with a face as red as a rooster's comb. "Dunno, Judge Pursuivant. Ain't kept up much on things, been pretty busy with my work. But I guess it's been goin' on since the Year One. . . ." He took a hand from the wheel and pointed ahead. "There's my place, up yonder, next to Hungry Hill. Your friend's rented a room there for you. You and him are my only boarders this summer."

A phrase had caught the judge's ear. "Hungry Hill?" he repeated, and gazed at the great green swelling, with its thatchy covering of evergreen brush and thicket. "It doesn't look hungry."

"I think that's the old Injun name. And there's a cave or pit, like an open mouth—" The driver broke off. "Well, here we are, getting there."

The house nestled comfortably at the foot of the big hill, with plump-looking trees around it—a house old and modest, but well built and well kept, with a stable and barn and rail-enclosed stock pen behind.

As the car stopped, someone came out on the porch and waved a long arm, then hurried down to shake hands with Pursuivant.

It was Ransome. He looked much improved in health and spirits since Pursuivant had last seen him, at New York in early spring. The doctors had apparently sent him to the right part of the country to get over his nervous breakdown. He was still gaunt, but there was color in his flat cheeks and sparkle in the dark eyes set deep under the bushy brows. Ransome was forty and looked younger, with a square, shallow jaw and black hair and mustache like curls of astrakhan.

"I saw your train come in, over yonder along the horizon," he told the judge, "and I sat out here to wait for Mr. Pitts to bring you back. Come on, both of you, and have a drink."

THEY followed him into a pleasant front room, with ancient flower-figured paper and white-painted woodwork, and massive old furniture that was older and better preserved than any of them. Ransome had set out a tray, with bottles, glasses, and a bowl of cracked ice.

"I thought that rabbit legend would fetch you when I wrote to you about it," he said to Pursuivant. "You collect such things, don't you? Hard to believe—but I've seen the bunny greeted on every road and path in Crispinville Township."

"Mr. Pitts here told me something about it," said Pursuivant. "Not much, though—not as much as I'd like to hear."

"Nobody seems to know much about it," Ransome said, pouring. "It's pretty well a local thing. Over in the next county, people hadn't even heard of it—said I was making it up. There's ice here, gentlemen. Take it or leave it?"

"Take it," said Pitts, with relish.

"Leave it," said Pursuivant, "and not much soda. . . . If you haven't any infor-

mation, Ransome; you must have a theory. You skeptics always have theories."

Ransome poured whiskey and spurted soda into the glasses. "Hnnn," he said, "might be a Negro thing—this used to be slave territory. One storekeeper in Crispinville thinks it may have come from the first English colonists; again, it might be Indian. But what keeps it so local? Can't you tell us, Pitts?"

"Not me," said Pitts, his eyes on the dewy glass held out to him.

They all drank. Pursuivant wiped his blond mustache. His spectacles were full of thoughtful lights.

"The rabbit's a great figure in folklore," he observed. "A witch named Julian Cox was tried in England in the 1660's, for turning into a rabbit. And Jules de Grandin once told me that southern French will turn back from a day's work because a hare hopped across their trail—bad luck, like a black cat."

"Never heard that," rejoined Ransome. "Of course, de Grandin's a fable-collector, like you. Of course, I read Uncle Remus when I was a boy—plenty of rabbit stuff there."

"And I used to carry the left hind foot of a graveyard rabbit for luck," contributed Pitts, sipping at his highball.

Pursuivant was also turning over the Uncle Remus tales in his mind. They were impressive and sometimes grim, for all the bright humor of Joel Chandler Harris. Br'er Rabbit, seemingly so harmless and plausible, had tricked all the larger and fiercer creatures in self-defense, or for profit, or for mere cruel fun; hadn't Br'er Wolf been deluded into killing his own children, and Br'er Fox shunted into a fire so that all his progeny looked singed, down into the present day?

"Don't you think," Ransome was saying, "that you're paying too much attention to a silly little custom—a triviality?"

"Hey," protested Pitts, taking his nose

from his glass, "it ain't silly when it's a township ordinance—you can't even hunt rabbits."

"And there are no trivialities in life, as Sherlock Holmes or somebody said," added Pursuivant. "As Mr. Pitts suggests, there must be a good reason for making the rule, and for observing it as well."

Ransome laughed loudly. His own drink had been long and strong, and he was at the bottom of it. "Time for me to do some missionary work," said he. Rising, he took two objects from the table.

They were the stock and barrels of an excellent shotgun, and they snicked neatly together in his knowing hands. He grinned above the weapon. "It's summer, and rabbit's aren't fit to eat, but just for the sake of smashing a superstition—" And he fed two shells into the double breach.

Pitts got up. "Better not do it, Mr. Ransome. It's 'gainst the law."

"I'll pay any fine, or whatever," laughed Ransome.

Pursuivant also rose, and set down his empty glass. "I want to go back to town and look into the community records. I'll leave my suitcase, and be back before sundown."

"Shall I run you back in the car?" offered Pitts.

"No, thanks. It's fine weather and lovely country, and only four miles. I'll walk." Pursuivant turned to Ransome. "Promise me you won't go rabbit-hunting until I return."

"Oh, all right," Ransome agreed, and stood the gun in a corner. He saw the judge to the door.

CRISPINVILLE was not the county seat, but Pursuivant knew that there would be a township trustee, a clerk and a constable. When he reached the ham-

let, he approved once again the well-painted old houses and the quaint little stores with canopy-like arcades jutting out over the wooden sidewalk, admired the square-steeped church that dominated all. He estimated that what Pitts called "the Year One" for this community would be well before the middle of the Eighteenth Century.

"There were settlers here before Daniel Boone's time," he thought, and inquired for the home of the township clerk. Finding it, he introduced himself.

The clerk was a frail ancient named Simmons, who prided himself on having most of his teeth and needing no spectacles. He was vague about old records, and only when Pursuivant pleaded did he pry into the clutter of files and trunks that jammed a rear room of his house.

"I been the Crispinville clerk for forty-four years," he grumbled, "and nobody never asked to see them original papers. Huh, they must be in this here oldest chest."

The oldest chest was very old indeed, made of unpainted hard wood from which a covering of rawhide was all but rotted away. Mr. Simmons probed and fiddled in the rusty lock with a brass key that might have gone with Noah's strong box, once or twice calling on heaven to witness his displeasure that the guards did not turn; but then Pursuivant stepped to his side and lifted the lid with a creak of the hinges—the lock had never been fastened. Inside lay papers, yellow and dusty, tied into bundles with antediluvian-looking twine. Simmons examined one handful, then another.

"Yep, these is the old records. Huh, the oldest bunch will be on the bottom, I expect." He dug down, and brought up a sheaf. "This is what you'll want, Judge."

Pursuivant took the papers, unfastened the string, and carefully unfolded them to avoid breaking at the creases. They were

covered with writing in rusty ink. At the head of the first was printed in block letters, crude and archaic but forceful:

RECORDES OF
Y^t TOWN COUNCIL OF CRISPINVILLE,
FOUNDED Y^{is} DAY Y^e 14 JUNE,
ANNO REGNII GEORGHII II
NONO

The ninth year of the region of George II; Pursuivant computed that it would be 1735 when Crispinville was founded as a formal community. The clerk let him carry the documents into the dining-room and spread them on the top of the table.

THE paper on which the records had been written was not of the best, and two centuries had made it brittle and teatant; but the first clerk of the township had written fluently and in a good bold hand, with all the underlinings and capitalizations of his age. There was a list of names, with official titles opposite, some half-dozen members of that original council. Then, as the first item of history:

This day we, the Chosen Council of the Town of *Crispinville*, did pay to certain Indians the Price agreed upon for the Lands whereon our Company will live and plant and reap. . . .

The price was itemized, and Pursuivant saw that, as usual in such matters, the Indians had all the worst of it—gaudy cheap cloth, beads, rickety hatchets and knives, one or two muskets and a horn of powder, and certain bottles of raw New England rum. The screed went on, and suddenly Pursuivant was aware that, upon the very threshold of his researches, he had found the origin of the custom he was tracing:

. . . The Indians engaging on their Part to respect our Rights and Boundaries and to keep the Peace, asking only that we observe their Manner of (as our Interpreter putteth) *Greeting the Hare*; that is, we shall not hunt Hares nor snare them, but upon meeting

them, salute and bespeak them as apertly as it were a *Christian Man*, and not a silly Hare.

To this last, certain of our Company did take Exception, and notably *Capt. Scadlock*, that such Custom was Childish and Fond; but the Chief Person of the Savages, him they call *King Mosh*, did bide firm, saying that the Rabbit was the *Otomon* of their People and sacred; and further that if we pledged not our Word to continue their Custom, they would never sell the Land, be the Price paid Ten Times Over. And finally the *Rev. Mr. Horton*, our Minister of God, did earnestly pray us to give over, shewing that we had Precedent in that the First Missionaries to *Britain* did respect and observe certain Festivals and Useages of the old Heathen; saying further that, right so as we took pity of these simple Indians their Beliefs, right so would they incline to stand our Friends. And so it was agreed upon both Sides, we all signing our Names, saving only *Capt. Scadlock*, and the Matter placed of Record and made a Rule whereby to Govern and guide the Town henceforth.

Pursuivant smiled in his mustache as he read, a smile of scholarly relish. He could see in his mind's eye that meeting, the stark jack-booted colonists and the brown, insistent savages. King Mosh—he had spoken out well for his people and faith, even against Captain Scadlock, who undoubtedly was the chief of the colony's armed forces; and the minister, Mr. Horton, had shown rare tact and liberality—perhaps, good man, he had hoped for converts among those Indians on whose behalf he spoke.

But that hope had been in vain, Pursuivant saw as he read further in the records. Less than a year later there had been a fight, and it had gone against the Indians. The same clerk wrote:

... and a Searching Party, following the tracks of *Captain Scadlock* upon the Second Day after his Vanishment, did trace him to that Hill which the Indians do call *Gontolab* (that is, the *Hungry Hill*)....

"Hello!" muttered Pursuivant, half aloud. "That's the hill back of Pitt's place!"

... and did find him, at the Mouth of the Cave near the Summit; and he had perished miserably, of many small Wounds, so thick upon him that no Inch of his Skin remained whole, nor did any Jot of his Blood remain unto him. And the Indians swore by their false gods that he came to his Death for failing to greet the Hare, rather pursuing and slaying Hares upon the Hill; which we took as meaning to say, that they themselves had slain the Captain. Wherefore, falling to our Arms. . . .

The remainder of the account was unsavory, and dealt with a one-sided conflict. The dead Indians were scalped, it seems, and the prisoners taken all hanged. A few survived and escaped the carnage. That had finished the savages in the vicinity. Only the name of the hill, and the rabbit-greeting, remained to memorialize them.

At this moment, the clerk came in and tapped his shoulder.

"Judge," he said, "here's Morgan Pitts come to find you."

Pursuivant looked up, his big forefinger marking the place on the old sheet of paper. Pitts came in, his eyes wide with serious wonder. "Judge Pursuivant," he said, "Mr. Ransome hasn't come back."

"Hasn't come back from where?"

"He went hunting for a rabbit—"

Simmons made a choking sound of protest, and Pursuivant sprang to his feet, quick as a cat for all his bulk. "Hunting for a rabbit? He promised me—"

Pitts nodded glumly. "Yes, sir, I know he did. But when you left, Mr. Ransome, he took his gun and went out. Said he'd be back in fifteen minutes. But"—the man's lips were quivering—"but he ain't. I think, Judge, you better come."

The old records of Crispinville, telling of superstition and pioneering and grim battle, had cracked and crumbled in Pursuivant's clenching hands. He laid down the remains.

"Have you brought your car, Mr. Pitts? All right, we'll drive back together."

THE house was still empty when they got there. Pursuivant moved away through the back yard, across a meadow and among brush and small trees at the foot of the hillside. It was as bright and hot as a tropical seashore. The judge's blue eyes had found and followed the trail of Ransome's tennis shoes. Pitts followed just behind.

"It's bad stuff, hunting rabbits," he chattered. "Folks around here don't believe in it—and when people don't believe—"

"It's best to string along with such beliefs, I agree," finished Pursuivant for him. "Look, Mr. Pitts. He found a rabbit trail here—fresh."

They could see that Ransome had squatted down above the pattern of little paw-prints in the leaf-mold; his toes only made deep depressions, and beside them was the narrow oval where he had rested the gun-stock. Then he had risen and followed the game slantwise up the hill. Pursuivant and Pitts went up after him, through dragging belts and tangles of brush, some of it thorny. Pitts spoke again:

"Look, Judge." He pointed with a knobby old forefinger to a whole clutter of tracks. "More rabbits—Mr. Ransome's hunting a mess of them."

The judge's shaggy head shook. "I'm afraid not. See here—some of the paw-prints fall over Mr. Ransome's shoe-marks. This bunch—flock—whatever you call a number of rabbits—it came along later. Mr. Ransome is hunting only that first one that made the lone trail."

"I see," said Pitts softly. "I see; and these other rabbits—are—*hunting Mr. Ransome!*"

IT WAS hotter than they had thought, as they pushed through one more clump of brambly growth, and came to where hunters and hunted had met.

They had not the time nor the wish to

read more than the essentials of the story written in large tracks and small upon the soft, spurned earth. Pursuivant began talking swiftly, pointing here and there.

"Look! Ransome stopped and, probably, aimed his gun. He was looking yonder, perhaps at that dark hollow place among those vine-grown saplings. The rabbit must have stopped there." He crossed over and peered. "Yes—see! The tracks were turned toward Ransome. It stopped and turned on its heels, to look at him."

"Like it was mocking him," said Pitts, and swallowed hard.

Pursuivant looked at the leaves behind the tracks. They were cut to pieces by shot—Ransome must have fired both barrels at that rabbit as it sat up to gaze at him. And then—

Pitts was down on one knee. "They swarmed over him as he fired!" he cried shakily. "Look, Judge—they rushed him from behind, right here!"

Pursuivant made a step and bent to pick up something from a patch of leafy weeds. "His gun!" he said, and snapped open the breech. "Both barrels were fired—he must have thrown it at them. Then he was unarmed."

He returned to where Pitts kneeled. The flurry of tracks seemed to say that Ransome had fallen, as under the impact of many missiles; what those missiles were could be deduced from the strength of certain hind-leg marks, telling of how rabbits had sprung straight upward and at the face or chest. The gun still in his hand, Pursuivant stooped to make out what had happened to Ransome then.

Here were hand-prints, deeply driven, as though weight had been supported upon the palms. Here was the scrape of a dragged knee, and another, with repetitions beyond—yes, Ransome had crept upon his hands and knees, stunned, wretched, driven. For at either flank of

his trail were the trails of his little adversaries, herding and harrying him, toward the dark opening among the vines where he had seen and fired upon the quarry that was really a decoy.

"Poor Mr. Ransome," Pitts was saying. "He should have obeyed the law—you got to respect things like that, or—"

"Stay behind me," commanded Pursuivant, and bent, thrusting with the muzzle of the shotgun into the space among the vines.

Within was empty gloom, for here the hill rose abruptly under a masking of herbage, and in it was a cave.

"Gontolah—the Hungry Hill," remembered Pursuivant. Yes, as Pitts had said, this place looked like an open, starved mouth, a lune-shape hole with a flat rim of rock above and another below, like gaping lips. And something was wedged in that mouth-like cavern.

He forced himself to touch it. His fingers closed on a slack, damp wrist. With a heave and a scrape, he dragged the body into view.

Yes, it was Ransome, or what had been Ransome. Pursuivant knew him by the contours of that pounded, lacerated head, by the leanness of the blood-boltered body inside chopped-up rags.

Pitts whimpered as the thing came into the light.

"Poor Mr. Ransome," he said again. "Now I know how—*oh!*"

Pursuivant whirled like a top at that final gasp of horror. He saw, too, what Spencer had seen.

The spaces among the bushes along their back trail were full of rabbits, all lean and gray with black and white blazings on legs and ear-tips, and all a trifle larger than ordinary. Every eye in that horde was turned upon the two men, and the eyes of meat-eating animals. They were an army, moving concertedly and purposefully upon the judge and Pitts,

who stood cut off with their backs to the cave.

Pursuivant's big fists tightened on Ransome's shotgun. He would not throw it, he told himself at once—clubbed, its metal-shod butt would smash these little assailants to rags. But Pitts was trying another weapon.

With eyes and outstretched hands he addressed himself to the foremost of the rabbits, the one that moved cautiously but steadily ahead of the press, like an officer leading troops in an orderly advance. He spoke, audibly and with a tremble of fear:

"H-howdy, Mister Rabbit!"

There was a momentary pause in the oncoming torrent of fur. A little eddy showed, then a parting in the ranks. They were making a way for Pitts to retreat through them, and he needed not a moment to make up his mind. He fairly darted along that open lane, which closed behind him. The expanse of fuzzy backs and upturned green eyes resolidified, and above it Pitts looked back at Pursuivant.

"Better say the words," he advised huskily. "They're closing in on you."

THEY converged slowly and smoothly, flowing like a puddle of grease—but grease scummed over with fur and green-black eyes, sprouting a meadow of ears. Pursuivant lifted the clubbed shotgun and set himself to strike. The leader-rabbit sprang suddenly at him. Pursuivant swung the gun, as a batter strikes at a ball. He could not miss—but the weapon swished thinly in the air, and the little sinewy body struck him at the base of the throat. A moment later more rabbits were springing at him—a dozen, a score, hundreds. His flailing with the gun did not find a single mark. He swayed under the bombardment, but kept his feet—he was stronger and bulkier than Ransome, he would take more battering to bring down—

"Say the words, Judge!" Pitts's voice

pleaded with him from beyond. "They ain't real rabbits—they'll finish you!"

Fighting, clawing at the rain of buffets, Pursuivant found his mind turning from the struggle to consideration of something else. What had the Indian, King Mosh, called the rabbit? *Ototemon*. Strange word. But with a familiar sound . . . suddenly he saw blue expanse, fringed with green. The sky among the treestops looked into his face, for he had come down upon his back. The rabbits had felled him. They were swarming around and upon him, their feet striking like great raindrops, incessantly and with precision—a rhythm that sapped his strength and his consciousness—again and again, on the same places.

How could he escape these airy blows and kicks? There seemed one way to crawl along—but it would lead to the cave, where Ransome had been. And once caught there, they'd have him. They'd dance upon him forever and forever, until he died, torn and bled to death by uncountable strokes—it would be like the falling of water upon a Chinese victim of the old drop-death—

"Say the words!" beseeched Pitts tearfully, his voice faint as an echo. "Say the words—howdy—"

Ototemon—the term meant something sacred to the Indians. And the minister, Mr. Horton, had gone on record as saying that the honest faith of savages could be respected, must be respected—

Somehow he got upon his feet, and lifted his hands as Pitts had done.

"Howdy," he mumbled thickly. "Howdy, Mister Rabbit."

And he stumbled and staggered away. Nothing prevented him. Pitts's hand caught his arm, supporting him. He was safe, being led downhill.

"Who'll believe?" he was saying to himself. "Who'll believe? . . ."

"Don't worry, Judge," Pitts replied.

"We're all right now. And this has happened before—all the folks say that the rabbits kill people near that cave. When some stranger drops out of sight, the folks go look for them and bury them—it ain't thought strange any more—I'll get a couple of men from town to help me bring back Mr. Ransome—"

Pursuivant was content to leave it at that. Later he would write and make an inquiry of Dr. Trowbridge, de Grandin's friend and fellow-scholar of the occult.

TROWBRIDGE'S letter came after the judge had returned to New York.

My Dear Pursuivant:

The meaning of the word *ototemon* should betray itself because of the familiarity of its corruption—*totem*. It's Algonquin and, as well as I can establish, means a local sacrosanctity, generally embodied in some animal. A tribe or clan or community would claim that such animals were in reality the incarnated spirits of dead ancestors, and full of supernatural power for good or evil.

I was sorry to hear about Ransome's death. Why are you so mysterious? De Grandin joins me in inviting you out to Huntingdon, to tell us about it. We have a strange story or two of our own that might intrigue you.

Yours, etc.,

And Trowbridge's almost indecipherable signature wound it up.

Pursuivant laid down the letter and reasoned himself out of any sense of defeat. He had wanted to respect the custom from the first, had blamed Ransome for defying it. Mr. Horton, the long-dead minister of Crispinville, had felt the same. "*We had precedent in that the first Missionaries to Britain did respect and observe certain festivals. . . .*" It might be heathen to greet a rabbit, yet it was part of formal and sincere religion. And when you were in Crispinville, you should do what the Crispinvillagers did.

Judge Pursuivant decided not to feel fouled by his experience. Only he would never look at a rabbit again, and keep his heart from thumping nervously.

"The Case of Charles Dexter Ward"—**LOVECRAFT**
NOVEL

SEABURY QUINN,
CLARK ASHTON SMITH

JULY

Weird Tales

15¢

I KILLED HITLER

THE ROBOT GOD

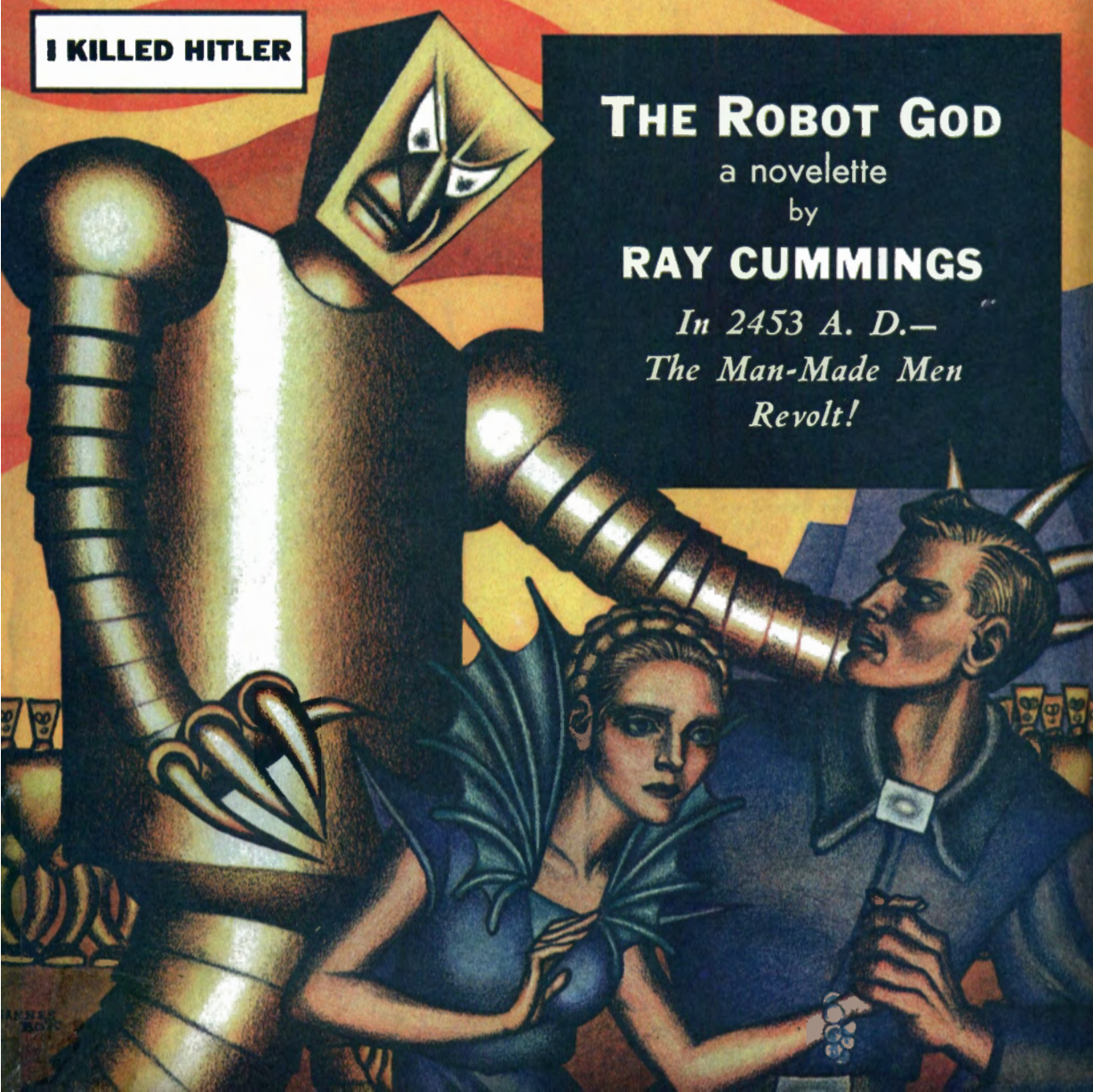
a novelette

by

RAY CUMMINGS

In 2453 A. D.—

*The Man-Made Men
Revolt!*





*If you should speak in the woods
of Amasookit, your words are
clothed with flesh and blood. So
the Indians believed. . . .*

It All Came True in the Woods

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

When the Horror passing speech
Hunted us along,
Each laid hold on each, and each
Found the other strong.

In the teeth of things forbid
And reason overthrown,
Helen stood by me, she did,
Helen all alone.

—Rudyard Kipling

HELEN took long steps to keep up with her father. Her chubby face, solemn in its pointed blue hood, turned up to him. "What are these woods called, Daddy?" she asked for the fifth time.

"The Indians called them A-ma-soo-

kit," Clay said patiently, blowing out blue smoke on the brisk autumn air. "Can't you remember, Helen? You're six now, and you recited 'Horatius' for the people at the cabin last night."

"'Horatius' is easy," Helen explained, as her short legs in ski-pants made hoppy

haste to stay beside her father. "A-ma-soo-kit," and she achieved it at last, "is not. That's foreign." She was silent, catching her breath, and Clay slowed to a saunter.

No sense in wearing the child out, and the walk along this trail was too beautiful to hurry, anyway; the brush that fenced them in on either hand offered every fall tint that was richest and brightest—lemon, peach, orange, scarlet, royal purple. As for the trees of the wood, taller and more distant, they might have been a sea-floor garden with their welters of warm red and gold clumped on their boughs.

"No, it isn't foreign, Helen," laughed Clay. "Why, the Indians were the first Americans—they lived here for ages before our people ever thought about the *Mayflower*."

"Before George Washington?" That was Helen's ultimate conception of antiquity.

"Ever so long before. They had a right to name these woods."

"What does the name mean, Daddy?"

Clay drew on his pipe. It was a favorite of his, a big-bowled English briar. Quite a time would pass, he mused, before he'd be buying any more pipes in England, what with the war and all—Helen was tugging at his hand to hurry the answer. "Why, I've told you that, too," he reminded. "A-ma-soo-kit—the Trees of Truth. Because the Indians believed that any words spoken here came true."

"Oooo!" Helen was again intrigued. She liked outings of any kind, and had danced when her parents took the cabin on the edge of this forest reserve for fall weekends. Now, if the place had a story attached—"All words come true," she repeated with relish. "You mean, like fairies and dwarfs?"

"Exactly," nodded Clay with the utmost gravity. Imaginative himself, he encouraged when he could any romancing his

little daughter might attempt. "Fairies and dwarfs."

"Oooo!" squealed Helen again, and glanced around searchingly. "Daddy, there was a dwarf right there—with a long beard and a red cap—peeking out from under that bush."

She pointed excitedly. Clay smiled down at her, and led the way around a bend of the trail. The shrubbery was thicker here, and its coloring even richer. Moss made the earth green under their boot-soles.

"It was something to see, then," Clay remarked, still grave. He knew some parents, and despised them, who would call any child who claimed to see dwarfs a liar. But Clay remembered his own childhood, the vividness of his games and imaginings.

Helen put her hands in her jacket pockets, imitating her father. "Are there witches here too?" she pursued her inquiries.

"Mmmmm—no." Her father would like to rule such thoughts out, ever since a night of awful dreams after Betty had heard some Hallowe'en tales. "Whatever witches there were in this country got driven away by Cotton Mather, you know."

"Is Cotton Mather here?" she asked at once.

"Cotton Mather is in heaven," said Clay. "Let's stop while Daddy fills his pipe."

Waiting, Helen glanced up at the half-hazy sky, as though she expected to see the old Puritan divine look out at her, dwarf fashion. "Well," she said, "are there giants in these woods?"

Tamping down the tobacco in the bowl, Clay held a match to it. He shrugged in defeat—what can you do with kids? They simply thrive on stories of excitement and danger and terror. He and Mrs. Clay had tried to hold Helen down to gentle fantasies like Peter Rabbit, but Helen's taste ran stubbornly to Red Riding Hood's wolf and even grimmer gentry. It came to Clay that in keeping the stories mild he might

be frustrating an instinct. That would be bad—what did J. G. Fraser have to say about such childhood tastes? Or Irvin S. Cobb? Or Freud? Clay decided not to deprive Helen further of giants. Bad dreams tonight would be on his own head.

“OH, YES, indeed,” he nodded. “The Trees of Truth would be full of giants. Big ones.”

“Bigger than you?” suggested Helen, who considered her father to be of tremendous stature.

“Much bigger, darling. And bigger than Uncle Frank, or the football boys you saw last week. Twice—three or four times as big. Taller than those trees yonder.”

Helen glanced at the trees, and shivered. “How many eyes do they have?” she almost whispered.

“Only one eye apiece,” improvised Clay promptly, remembering the Cyclops who imprisoned Ulysses. “One eye in the middle of the forehead. But, on the other hand, they have each two or three rows of teeth—sometimes more, and as sharp as swords. And shaggy beards.”

She glanced over her shoulder at the trees, and grew pale.

“I’m afraid of them,” she said.

But Clay had been thinking hard and fast, to deal with just such a contingency. “Don’t worry,” he told her. “The giants can’t hurt us—not when Daddy smokes this magic pipe all the way from England.” He blew out a great cloud of blue vapor by way of punctuation. Because giants are afraid of it.”

“Really truly?” And Helen squinted hopefully at the pipe.

“Oh, yes. Terribly afraid. They’d never dare come near enough to touch us.” Clay began to mix in fragments of half-forgotten Indian lore, learned a generation ago in Boy Scout camp. “You see, the old Indians used tobacco for a charm. Their medicine men smoked it to drive away

bad things—spirits and witches and so on. Giants are bad things, just about the worst. They hate the smell of tobacco. Especially,” and he exhaled a bigger cloud, “when it’s in a magic pipe, like Daddy’s.”

Helen glanced at the trees once more, but not pallidly this time. Her chin was squared.

“Well, then, I won’t be afraid of those old giants over there,” she announced sturdily.

At her games again, thought Clay. “Good girl!” he applauded. “Let’s sit down here, on this nice soft rock, and I’ll tell you more things.”

He had meant to turn the conversation to the autumn colors of the leaves, discussing them in simple terms Helen’s six-year-old mind might digest. But, as she took a seat beside him, she had no such idea.

“What do giants wear, Daddy?” she continued on the subject which just now preoccupied her.

“They wear skins,” he smiled down at her. “Deerskins and bearskins, sewed together like patchwork, to make a piece big enough to cover them.”

Her eyes were still fixed on the middle distance beyond the brush. “What kind of shoes?”

“No shoes, of course. Their feet are too big for shoes, aren’t they now?”

“I suppose so,” agreed Helen seriously. “I can’t see their feet from here—What do giants eat?”

“Men,” said Clay impressively.

“Men who don’t have magic pipes?”

“Yes.” To comfort her, Clay blew smoke. “Nobody had better come among the giants without tobacco.”

“They look scared,” announced Helen, and stood up as if to get a better view of something. “Look at them, Daddy.”

“Yes, yes, you’re right,” nodded Clay, stooping to pick up a very brilliant maple leaf. “Now, take this to Mummy when

we get back, dear. Say that it's a souvenir of this walk in the woods."

"You're not looking, Daddy. Not looking at the giants." Helen was pointing insistently.

To fall in with her humor, Clay lifted his head and looked.

THERE were three of them, and not more than thirty yards away, taller than the topmost branches of the gorgeous red-and-gold trees.

Clay could see them from the waist upward, above the thick trailside brush—lumpy, hairy, skin-clad, like the ugliest of colossal statues come to life. Two had beards—one black, the other grizzled and blond—and the third wore long gun braids hanging like lengths of cable at either side of a gross, hairless face the width of a bureau.

So Helen had not been imagining giants, after all.

In the back of a brain that throbbed and whirled, Clay fenced off a tiny corner for what sensible thoughts he could summon. No time now, he told himself, to wonder how or why. The necessity was to get away—get Helen away, at least. Without rising from where he sat, he caught Helen's shoulder and pressed her back and back, sliding her off the stone.

"Darling," he said, wondering why his voice remained steady, "there are bushes near us. Crawl under them. Far under. If there are thorny branches, get under those. Don't move or make a noise, until Daddy has made those—those things go away from here. When you can't see or hear them any more, get up and run back along this trail we came. Get to the cabin. Once you start running, don't stop—"

He heard the dry leaves rustle as she silently obeyed. She was doing her part. Now he must do his.

Springing up suddenly, as high into the air as he could, he flourished both arms

over his head. At the top of his voice he yelled:

"Hi! Hi! Hi!"

From his gaping mouth the pipe dropped, bouncing on the mossy ground beside the rock. Clay turned and ran his fastest down trail.

At almost the same moment he heard a mighty crashing, as of elephants among the timber. He permitted himself one backward look. The three great towers of flesh had sprung through the brushy hedge and were lumbering after him. All three. None had paused to hunt for Helen.

He felt a thrill of elation. Thus the parent partridge saves its hidden young—by diverting danger and pursuit after itself. He flourished his arms and yelled again. Then he saved his breath for running.

No use.

Their legs were longer than his entire body. One of their strides made four of his. Behind, then above, he heard a furnacelike panting. A grip fastened upon him—fingers as long as his arms. He was lifted from the ground in mid-career. The air rang with a deep stormy growl—a concert of prodigious laughter.

After one convulsive struggle, like a chicken in the jaws of a fox, Clay made himself go slack. He might have a chance later, had best save his strength for that. If there was no chance, a doomed man should have dignity—The three gathered and exulted grossly over him, the two giants and the giantess. To them he was smaller than Helen would be to him like a doll or a baby. He saw at close hand their eyes—each had but the one, deep set in the middle of the low forehead—as large as tennis balls; their mouths like open satchels, all studded inside with rows of pointed sharky teeth; their hairiness, their patchwork skin garments, their bare feet like toe-fringed bolsters. Dangling in mid-air, Clay recognized his own handiwork.

Among the A-ma-soo-kit, the Trees of Truth, any spoken word became fact. The idle improvisations of a father diverting his little one had taken shape, flesh, life.

The one who held him was the oldest, with a mat of buckskin beard turning gray. Some of his myriad teeth were broken. This captor grunted to the younger black-beard and the terrible woman-mountain with the braids. The dark giant drew from his girdle-thong a stone knife as long as a scythe, with which he began to whittle.

First he uprooted a cedar sapling, and pared away its branches with powerful slashing digs of his blade. Then he sharpened the tip, like a pencil. Beside the trail lay a fallen trunk of pine, dead and beginning to rot. Setting down his pole, the young giant caught this log in his huge hands and with a single humping of his muscles wrenched it in two lengthwise. Kneeling, he set the sharpened point of cedar upon the exposed inside of one slab, and began twirling the stake briskly between his palms.

Thus spun, the point drilled a hole. Wood meal crawled out. It smoked from the friction, glowed. The giantess, with a fistful of shredded bark, evoked a flame that greatened and put forth smudge—fire made by rubbing sticks. Fire for what?

Beneath big skilful hands the fuel quickly caught. The flames grew and climbed. The grizzled monster that held Clay nodded his big bushy head in approval. It was a cooking fire.

His huge captor lifted him. The cedar point turned toward his stomach. The other two giants watched with relish, and the tongue of the giantess, like a red banner, came into view to moisten her lips.

This, Clay thought with the corner of his brain kept sensible, was an end that nobody would ever believe. He would never be seen again. Helen, back at the cabin, would tell a story that would not

make sense. Even if searchers found his bones, stripped and crushed—

"You let my Daddy alone!" commanded someone close at hand.

THE voice was young, shrill and indignant. Clay bracing himself to feel the crushing impalement of the cedar stake, knew that voice, and in despair counted his sacrifice as useless—Helen hadn't hidden, hadn't escaped. She had followed his abhorrent captors, was coming among them.

"Let him alone," she was repeating, "or I'll—" There was deadly, confident menace in her little-girl voice.

The grizzled giant lowered both his hands, with the spit in one and Clay in the other.

His huge single eyes widened and protruded grossly. The firelight made it gleam like a very nasty jewel. The fulvid tangle of beard parted, the open mouth writhed over the rows of broken fangs.

Clay managed to turn his head as he hung in the prisoning grip.

He had never realized how small Helen was, how frail. She seemed barely as long as any one of the great bare feet among which she had planted herself. Her arms were set akimbo, her head flung back so that the hood drooped from it, her eyes glittered. So Clay had seen her often before, when her young temper was up. Only one thing was really strange about Helen.

In a corner of her mouth, clamped tight between her six-year molars, rode the English briar pipe he had dropped. Above and around Helen's ruffled hair whirled a wreath of tobacco smoke. Even as he saw all this, she puffed out a bigger, bluer cloud.

"Why did you—" Clay tried to begin, but no words came. He was done for, unable to move or speak. Helen looked, not at him, but at the giants.

"I guess I'll show you!" she squealed at the three staring hulks, just as she might

have defied the biggest and roughest boy in her school.

One giant, the black-bearded one that seemed youngest, was first to move. Very rapidly he lifted one foot and set it down again, well behind the other. Then he retreated a second pace. A third. The giant-ess, who had crouched to blow upon the fire, also moved backward on all fours, rather like a tremendous and revolting crab. Helen favored these fugitives with no more than a flick of her bright eyes. She wheeled toward the grizzled one who still stood his ground, holding Clay like a trapped frog.

Rising on tiptoe, Helen hooked one hand in her father's trouser-cuff. "You put him down," she ordered terribly, "or I'll blow some more smoke, and you'll wish you had."

She suited action to word.

Above Clay sounded a great hacking cry, as the giant choked and strangled. He felt himself released, falling heavily to the ground. The odor of burning tobacco smote his nostrils. He heard the heaviest of feet scrambling and stumbling away. He heard Helen laugh, in harsh triumph, as Deborah might have laughed over the fall of Sisera's army.

"They're gone, Daddy," she said brightly. "You shouldn't have dropped your pipe in the first place. But I remembered—giants hate tobacco. I came to save you."

Mist swallowed Clay and he fainted gratefully.

When he awoke, Helen was sitting beside the great dying fire, quite unconcerned. "Did you have a nice sleep?" she asked.

He rose on his elbow. "How long was I like that?"

"Not very long. About five minutes, I guess." She offered him his pipe. "It didn't make me sick a bit."

Clay got up, shakily. Helen took his hand, as though it represented to her the surest pledge of safety. They turned homeward on the trail. "Helen," he said, "what has happened today? Before I—slept?"

"Oh, you mean about those giants? Why, just what you said." She looked up at him with a little wonder that he should not be sure.

Then it had been true, among the Trees of Truth. She, too, had seen and known. "Helen, how were they driven away?"

"With the magic pipe, Daddy. "You know. I smoked it."

This as carefully and clearly as though she were the adult speaking to the child. "Why, Helen," he said, "this isn't a ma—"

Then he broke off. Better to be careful about talking away any protection. He asked another question. "You weren't afraid?"

"Not with the magic pipe. You told me they hated it. And everything comes true in these woods—whether it's about giants or pipes."

Clay agreed in his heart that it was a thing not to be explained—only to tremble over his whole life long. Helen was more fortunate. Six years old in a world of wonders and importance, to her three hungry giants were no more wondrous or important than many another thing.

"Don't tell Mummy about this, Helen," he said. "We'll have it for our secret."

She smiled and nodded, pleased by the word "secret." Clay felt better. That would help matters now. Some time when she was older, and mentioned the business as a childhood memory, he could get her to agree that it was a dream—grotesque, frightening, but only a dream.

"Daddy," said the little girl, "are there squirrels here, too? Because I think I see one."

A Sorcerer Runs for Sheriff" by ROBERT BLOCH

SEPTEMBER

Weird Tales

15¢

SEABURY
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NELSON
S.
BOND

AUGUST

DERLETH'S

Novelette—

"BEYOND THE THRESHOLD"





"In the darkness two semi-shapes glided swiftly by, like puffs of smoke from the house."

The Half-Haunted

By GANS T. FIELD

*Would YOU laugh if something followed you all around your home—
something cold and sneaky, that wasn't even there
when you turned your head?*

I went into a house, and it wasn't a
house. —A. A. MILNE.

FOR six months Judge Pursuivant had intended to visit that old dwelling with the strange history, but Judge

Pursuivant often has trouble finding time to do what he most wants. The fall passed, the winter came. He spent Christmas, not very joyfully, helping the widow of a friend repossess some property at Salem. New Year's Eve found him at Harrison-

ville, where de Grandin and Towbridge wanted his word on translating certain old Dutch documents better left untranslated. Heading west and south toward his home, he passed Scott's Meadows. And, though it was nearly dark and snowy, he could not resist the opportunity to visit Criley's Mill then and there.

A druggist on the little main street gave him directions. The judge drove up a steep ill-paved road, then between hills crowned with naked trees. Eventually he came to an old quarry road and followed it to here, across a rapid brown brook, a creaky bridge led to the place.

By the last rays of the sun, he decided he had either come the wrong way or come too late.

He had heard of a tall, gaunt building, the ruins of a mill house—a place two hundred years old, that looked two thousand. This was almost the opposite—quite new, of brown shingles, low and rambling, with a screened porch and wide windows. The place should have been cheerful, but it was not.

Pursuivant drove across, got out and knocked at the door. Snow began to shimmer down. Lights went on in the front room, and a man opened the door. He was small and slim, with a gray forelock and a lined, shrewd face, reminiscent of the late Will Rogers. He wore a smoking jacket and slippers.

"Yes?" he half challenged.

"Excuse me," replied Pursuivant, hunching his massive shoulders, "but is this Criley's Mill? The haunted house?"

"Haunted?" echoed the man on the threshold. "Why, I—I don't know."

There seemed to be only one thing to say. Pursuivant shook snowflakes from his tawny mustache and said it: "I'm sorry to have troubled you. I seem to have made a mistake."

At once the other changed his manner. "Oh, no, sir. No mistake. This *was* the

place. You see, I built where Criley's Mill was—just finished and moved in on Thanksgiving—look here, won't you come in? I'm sorry if I was abrupt. Just nerves. I didn't know who might be coming to my door—so far away from everything—"

His gaunt little hand caught at Pursuivant's big one. "Come in, sir. Or—wait. It's putting on to snow. I've got a double garage around back. Want to slide your car in with mine? Then we'll have a drink. Maybe a bite to eat."

He wanted Pursuivant to stay. The judge gazed at him with big blue eyes, deceptively innocent. Then he nodded and said, "Thanks. I'll be very glad to stay."

AFTER stowing the car, he returned through the snow. The little man still waited at the door to usher him in. "What did you say your name was?"

The judge had not said, but he replied, "Pursuivant. Judge Keith Pursuivant. I'm interested in haunted houses."

"And I'm Alvin Scrope—country editor, retired, bachelor." They were in the front room now, a room designed to answer a man's prayer for comfort. It had cushioned furniture, thick rugs, bright pictures, plenty of light, a shelf of books. But, as outside, the cheer was somehow lacking. "You'll have to pardon me," said Alvin Scrope. "My house boy left here New Year's eve, and I'm running the place alone for a day or so."

From a side table he lifted a bottle of scotch and a syphon. Mixing two highballs, he gave one to Pursuivant. "Snow's coming down harder. You'd better plan to stay the night."

Pursuivant laid aside overcoat and black hat. "You are very kind," he said, wondering why he had been half-rebuffed at first, then almost wheedled into entering. Alvin Scrope dabbed at his forelock.

"Yes, sir," he said, trying to sound

hearty, "I built this right where the old mill stood. How d'you like it?"

The judge fitted his big body into an armchair, and sipped. "I don't quite know yet. I've only come. How do you like it yourself, Mr. Scrope?"

Another dab at the forelock. "To tell the truth, I don't know either." He, too, drank before continuing. "Maybe because I've never had a place of my own before. And I've been used to working, always on the go with my paper—now I'm a little lost with all the slack time on my hands. You know how that is. But when I first saw the spot, with the ruined mill and all, stuck away here, I thought it was as nice a building site as I'd ever heard of."

"I've been told a little about the mill and its legend," ventured Pursuivant, rummaging a pocket for his pipe. At once his host began the tale, as Pursuivant had hoped:

"The place, I understand, was built before the War of Independence. It was owned and run by a man named Criley. He had a wife, a son and a daughter."

"Mind if I take notes?" asked Pursuivant, producing notebook and pen. "Go on, Mr. Scrope."

"Well, the war came. The miller and his son joined Washington's army. The British took New York, and there was a long, hard scrap to see whether they'd stop there or take the rest of the country, too."

PURSUIVANT nodded. He knew that dark, desperate phase of his nation's history. After the first disaster to American arms, the fighting had taken on the somber complexion of raids, ambushes, betrayals. Considerable savagery on both sides. Nathan Hale and John Andre—two fine gentlemen—hanged like felons. Thousands of other tragedies. All the New York area—including this part of New Jersey—stuck full of grim deeds, giving rise to creepy tales.

Scrope went on:

"New York had quite a few Hessian soldiers stationed around—hired to fight the Americans, you know."

Again Pursuivant nodded. His Virginia ancestor had followed Washington in the battle of Trenton. "The Hessians weren't very fierce fighters," he commented.

"There was an exception to that rule," Scrope declared pithily. "Still taking notes, Judge?—I can't tell you this particular Hessian's name, but it comes down in the story how he looked. Big as you, I figure. Burly. He was a famous hunter back home in Germany. Maybe a criminal, joining the army to escape— Anyway, he could beat the Americans at their own game of hunt and shoot."

"That's hard to believe," rejoined Pursuivant. "Some of Washington's men were hard-set old Indian fighters."

"This Hessian outdid the Indians. He'd strip naked—even in winter—and paint himself like a Mohawk and sally out to kill. He was a dead shot, and a devil with sword or hatchet or knife." Scrope paused to bite the end off a cigar. "He could track or stalk anything, and he'd fight two soldiers at a time. Sometimes more. He raided farms and murdered civilians, even women and children. Quite a score he ran up."

Scribbling in his book, the judge could see in his mind one of those fancy-portraits so often vivid—a naked colossus, streaked with red and black, a heavy-boned face, thick, pale brows over slitted eyes. A belt stuck full of weapons. Had the Hessian looked like that? Pursuivant filled his pipe and thrust it under his mustache. "Go on," he prompted.

"The two women left here at the mill hated and feared that Hessian. They plotted against him. Pretended to be British sympathizers, and scraped an acquaintance."

"That was nervy of them," commented the judge. His mind's eye showed him new

pictures. Probably the daughter made the overture—buxom, rosy-cheeked on a chill afternoon, she managed to encounter the man of blood on a country lane. The Hessian would be a heavy-handed gallant. His broad, tough face grinned admiringly. The rural beauty, trying not to tremble, would venture a return smile, a curtsy.

"They invited him to dinner," Scrope continued. "He put on his best uniform—"

Strange that Hessian butcher would look in full dress—white small-clothes and gaiters modelling his brawny legs, the red coat with white facings and shiny buttons cramping his barrel torso. How out of place the powdered hair, the tall grenadier cap! But Scrope was getting on to the climax:

"When he sat down at the table, one of the women—mother or daughter, the stories disagree—stuck a serving knife into his back. They got rid of the body somehow—walled it up or buried it in the cellar. But the spirit returned."

"How many saw it?" demanded Pursuivant.

"Many. The mother died of fright, and the daughter of jumping from an attic window, before the year was out. The son committed suicide before he'd been long back from the war—nobody says anything about the father, I guess he was killed in some battle. Well, that disposed of the family. The mill went out of use. There's lots of newer yarns. A girl from Scott's Meadows yonder stayed one night ten years ago, on a dare. Next morning she was roaming around, too crazy to talk."

"And you bought the place?"

"Yes. Tore down the old mill house, and rebuilt on its foundations. Shouldn't that lay any ghosts, Judge Pursuivant?"

"Most rebuilders prefer to burn the haunted place entirely," said the judge. "However, that depends on how much they believe in ghosts. I take it that you don't laugh at these stories."

Scrope almost bit his cigar in two. "Would you laugh," he asked, "if two houseboys quit on you inside of six weeks? If something followed you all around your cellar, something cold and sneaky, that wasn't ever there when you turned around? If you fidgeted all the time, like at a play by Ibsen or a story by Poe? It's no laughing matter, Judge."

Pursuivant leaned forward. "You imagine disturbing sights and sounds?"

"Right. Never quite see or hear them—just a whisper, a shadow in dim places, when I'm all alone here. I wish," and Scrope grew somber, "that I belonged to some classical old church. A priest, with bell, book and candle, would be mighty comforting."

"Just so," agreed Pursuivant. "It so happens that I know an old formula of exorcism. I'm not a clergyman, but I offer it for what it's worth, as charm or psychological clearance."

Scrope frowned, then smiled. The subject was new to him. Pursuivant made haste to be logical: "I'm not trying to make an occult convert out of you, Mr. Scrope. But it seems that a symbol or ceremony might serve as rationalization—a psychological peg to hang your worries on and forget them entirely—"

"Right as a rabbit!" cried Scrope, almost explosively. "Go ahead, Judge. Do it."

Pursuivant set down glass and pipe, and stood up. Scrope also rose from his chair. In so doing he moved backward and stood almost by the darkened door that led to the rear of the house. Pursuivant began solemnly:

"All ye evil spirits, I forbid you this man's bed, his couch; I forbid you, in heaven's name, his house and home; I forbid you, in the name of God, his blood and flesh, his body and soul. Let all evil return from him and his, unto you and yours, in the name of the Trinity."

He finished, and Scrope's face showed a sudden thankful relief—which went out like a light. Scrope's thin body suddenly gyrated, reeled. His mouth opened, shouting:

"Let go! Let go!"

HE staggered backward to the door, turned halfway and braced himself against the jamb. He seemed to struggle with something beyond. Pursuivant sprang toward him, and at that instant Scrope was walking shakily back toward the center of the room. His eyes were glassy, his lips slack, his face pale.

"Thought it had me," he panted.

"What?" demanded Pursuivant, quickly pouring whiskey.

"Didn't you see? That big thing with a naked arm—and no eyes—"

"Drink this. I saw nothing."

Scrope drank obediently. Color returned a little. He spoke rapidly, as one who convinces himself of a hopeful fact: "My imagination ran away with me, didn't it?"

"Did it?"

Pursuivant filled Scrope's glass again. Plainly Scrope was trying to save his nerves by chatter. "Oh, it's quite clear, Judge. I've keyed up my imagination to what seems like reality. I was sure some sort of boogey—but if you didn't see it—"

"If I didn't see it," Pursuivant took up Scrope's words, "there is still no proof that it doesn't exist."

Scrope looked blank, and Pursuivant continued, "I take nothing for granted. This looks like the beginning of one of my adventures."

"But look here!" Scrope suddenly went a little wild in his speech. "You were reciting a spell against just that sort of thing. Why should it—dare to tackle—"

"Desperation. To stave off defeat. Wait here."

He went to the inner door and peered. There was a dim hallway to a kitchen, an

open doorway for a bathroom at the left, and two closed doors to the right. He asked about them.

"Bedrooms," replied Scrope, steadying his voice. "Want a light?"

"No, thanks." Pursuivant entered the hall.

IT WAS like stepping into a fog—into the vapor, for instance, of many damp, filthy coats in a sealed closet. Pursuivant snorted, and walked quickly through to the kitchen, turning on a light. Breathing was comfortable there. The sweat dried on his brow and his tawny mustache.

"All clear?" Scrope was asking.

"So far." The judge gazed around the clean white kitchen, with automatic refrigerator and electric range. It was the most reassuring room so far. He walked back into the hall, then into the rear bedroom.

"That's my room," Scrope informed him, from the parlor door.

Pursuivant waited only a moment in the chamber, which filled the rear quarter opposite the kitchen. Then into the hall yet again, to glance into the bathroom. It was a fight to throw off the smothering spiritual weight hanging in the dim atmosphere. Finally to the closed door of the front bedroom. "Who sleeps here?" he asked, hand on knob.

"You will, if you stay tonight," Scrope replied, and the judge entered.

In the first instant he thought he had been struck—his knees wavered, his brain swam and darkened. The walls—weren't they ruinous, flaking away?—whirled around him in the gloom. But he kept his feet and his head, groped for the light switch, turned it.

He had been wrong. The room was quite modern, cream-papered, and should be bright; but the light was as murky as though it shone through smoke. A neat single bed, a bureau, an armchair—how

could that arrangement cause such a deep shadow in the far corner? Or was it a shadow?

The weight he had felt in the hall was doubled here, crushing him as a diver is crushed by sea-bottom pressures. The switch clicked, though Pursuivant had not touched it. The light went out abruptly.

Something pawed at him through the darkness. A hand—he saw it dimly, but not its arm. Was there an arm? Pursuivant jerked away, but refused to retreat. Now a face hung in the thick dusk—a head, anyway, for he made out the contour only, not the features. But it must have a mouth. For he felt a fanning of tepid breath, heard a mumble that became a word of sorts:

"*Raus. . . .*"

German. *Get out!*

Pursuivant stared at the hanging oval, trying to find eyes to fix with his own. Now another touch, at his shoulder. Light this time. Fluffy. Another voice, so soft as to be felt rather than heard:

"No . . . stay . . . you came to save. . . ."

The featureless head became more solid, and a suggestion of body was visible beneath—thick, as big as Pursuivant's own body. Wide-planted columns that might be mist-moulded legs. Again: "*Raus!*"

Pursuivant backed from the room, leaving the door open. He was in the parlor again, wiping his face. He felt better.

Scrope, mixing more drinks, looked at him questioningly. "You felt it too, huh?"

"I felt something. For a moment I saw." The judge paused to marshal his findings. "Who has ever slept in that front bedroom?"

"Nobody. The house-boy—before he left—had a lean-to off the kitchen. You're inaugurating my guest room tonight, judge. Here, have a drink."

They touched glasses and drank. Then they crossed the heavy-aired hall to the kitchen. Scrope quickly cooked a meal,

simple but hearty—ham, eggs, home-fried potatoes, strong coffee. They ate at a white-topped table. Pursuivant acted as though fear had not come to him that night.

"I suggested that the Hessians weren't good fighters," he observed, holding out his cup, "but they were Germanic—and Germany has been the home of witches and devils. Read *Faust*, read *Phantasmagoria*, read the Brothers Grimm. And in a file of *Old New York*—out of print now—I found a story of how two Hessian soldiers bewitched a Manhattan farmer."

"True story?"

"It's in the reminiscences of George Rapaelje. That's a respected name in old New York history. Rapaelje claims to have seen it happen. Yes, and other Hessians—settling in Pennsylvania and New Jersey—worked magic."

"Of course. Look at that Headless Horseman yarn of Irving's," contributed Scrope. "Judge, you've got something. If that spell you recited—I wish you hadn't, for it didn't work."

Pursuivant looked earnestly at Scrope. "I didn't finish. It must be said three times, an hour apart." He drew out a thick gold watch. "And an hour has passed, or nearly."

Quite steadily, if not casually, he walked into the hall. Scrope came just behind. Again Pursuivant felt the baleful weight and closeness. Undaunted, he began to recite for the second time:

"All ye evil spirits, I forbid you this man's bed, his couch; I forbid you, in heaven's name, his house and home; I forbid—"

It had come heavily, noiselessly, out of the front bedroom. A hunchbacked hulk of it, that straightened and showed itself as tall and powerful as Pursuivant.

The judge knew amazement, complete but rational. Even in the half-light, he made out only a silhouette, roughly human,

vague at the edges—clothed or naked, he could not say. As before, a faceless head lifted itself on broad shoulders. Only the fingers of the hand were distinct. They spread, advanced. Thus his eyes summed up, while he kept reciting the exorcism, down to its end:

"—all evil return from him and his unto you and yours, in the name of the Trinity."

It blundered forward, clutching.

The doorway was no place to fight in, not even if the foe were normal. Pursuivant retreated, quickly and lightly for all his bearlike weight. Behind him, Scrope had run whimpering to the back door, tried to tear it open without unlocking.

"Come on!" Scrope was crying. "We'll get out of here!"

"Wait!" called Pursuivant in reply. "Look!" And Scrope paused and turned back.

"The thing's gone," said Pursuivant. "It vanished before my eyes as I retreated."

He clasped his big hands behind his back, scowling. Something was wrong here; absolutely unconventional—for there is a certain unconventionality about demons and their ways.

How often did the old books say that the best way to quell a specter is to face it dauntlessly? Yet here was the exact reverse. The foe had faded only when he and Scrope fled. He glared at the empty hall, as though to read there an answer to the enigma.

But the hall was not empty. In it was another pale suggestion of shape, slender this time. And the softer voice he had sensed in the bedroom:

"Again—again—"

It, too, vanished.

Scrope drew alongside of Pursuivant, peering. "Judge, were you and I seeing things? Both of us?"

Pursuivant actually grinned, and shook

his tawny head. "No chance of that, Scrope. People who see things don't see the same things at the same time."

"Group-hypnotism," began Scrope, as though the word might be a comfort, but again Pursuivant gestured a demur.

"I believe in many strange things, Scrope, but not in that. Don't go back into the hall. Sit here, in the kitchen. I begin to understand—to guess, at least."

They sought their chairs. Pursuivant faced the door.

"The old familiar situation, worn threadbare by writers of fantasy," he pronounced. "The murdered one haunts the place of his destruction." He stared hard into the hallway, wondering if he had really seen a stir of movement there. "Anyway, it's here—spiteful and harmful, able to attack—"

"That's right," nodded Scrope, sighing. "He appeared to me, then you, then to both of us."

"Which brings us to point number two. The spell is going to work."

Scrope glanced up in almost prayerful eagerness. "You're sure?"

"Not quite sure of anything in life or death, but this thing's desperate. It's trying to fight us. I gather, from what you tell me, that it never manifested itself so strongly before—"

Scrope was nodding eagerly. "Sure. It's been around here, a sort of edgy atmosphere that drove my house-boys away—but nothing like this. As you say, it's playing the game for keeps now."

"It's in danger," replied Pursuivant, his blue eyes remaining fixed on the hallway. "So are we. But it's alone in its fight, and we have friends."

"Friends?" echoed Scrope.

"I saw another shape, or near-shape. Twice. It doesn't threaten. It pleads. It wants us to go ahead and win."

Scrope gazed at Pursuivant. "I think I saw it, too. But if it's a ghost—"

"Don't you realize that a ghost might want release? And others beside the Hessians found a tragic death here. Two women, didn't you say—I heard a voice ask for the final repetition of my spell. *Again*, it said."

"We-ell—" began Scrope uncertainly.

"The spirits of those two women are here, too," said Pursuivant confidently.

"The evil of the place is too strong to let them escape, even though they're dead."

"Judge!" gasped Scrope, very pale. He swallowed twice, and continued:

"You realize something? If something happens to us—"

"Exactly," agreed Pursuivant, very steadily. "We'd be caught, too. For all eternity. I realize it perfectly. That is why we must push this thing through to the end—and win."

He rose once again and went to the door. Foot on the sill, he leaned ever so narrowly in. Then he drew quickly back, like a spectator from the cage of an angry beast.

"Still here," he reported. "Ready for us. It, too, knows that the showdown's at hand."

Scrope studied the doorway, eyes and lips hard. "I've got a theory. It stays in that part of the house, the middle part. Might it live in the cellar?"

"Why?" asked Judge Pursuivant.

"Because the cellar—the old basement—lies only under the bathroom and the hall and that guestroom, with only a bit lapping under parts of the kitchen and—"

"By thunder, you have it!" interrupted Pursuivant excitedly.

While Scrope stared, the judge fished his pen from his vest pocket. He began to sketch, on the table-top.

"See here," he lectured as he drew. "Your house is sprawling—great big rooms, making a wide base, like this." He outlined a square. "And the cellar is rather centrally located, so." He marked

in a smaller rectangle, which took a middle slice of the square.

"Yes. That's about like it," nodded Scrope. "What are you getting at?"

"Don't you see, man?" cried Pursuivant, almost roughly. "That basement shows the limits of the old house—narrow and high, just as this new one is broad and low. The spirit haunted the old place. Your house takes in that original territory, and some new ground as well."

He threw down the pen.

"You're only half haunted, Scrope."

Understanding dawned into the little man's face. He sprang to his feet. He began a glad jabber:

"That changes everything. We're safe. If we don't go in there—"

"Oh, but we're going in there."

Scrope looked wide-eyed, scared. Pursuivant elaborated:

"The last recital of the spell will take place right in that thing's den—right on his own dunghill, so to speak. We'll destroy him forever, where he can't seek refuge from us."

A GAIN an hour was passed. The two rose from their chairs in the kitchen.

"It's time," said Scrope, looking at his wrist watch. "Judge, must I come in there with you?"

"You must," Pursuivant assured him. "Into that front bedroom. The creature must face his final exorcism."

He walked to the hall, and in. Scrope kept close behind, on feet that sounded amazingly heavy for so small a body. They stood together in the hall's dimness.

It was no longer the hall, new and narrow and fresh-painted in light color. It was a corner of something else.

Despite the gloom, Pursuivant could see plainly that the walls had somehow fallen away. He stood as in a wide and ruinous apartment, with shattered windows extending almost to the high ceiling. The half-

rotted floor boards were strewn with rubbish, like plaster fallen away from ancient laths. Wind—there was surely wind here, in the very center of Scrope's snug home. Yes, wind, blowing through the cracks in this big wrecked place to which they had somehow been wafted. . . .

"Judge," breathed Scrope, "I know. This is the old mill—it looked like this, before they tore it down—"

"Quiet," bade Pursuivant. He moved in the direction where he remembered the front bedroom's door to be. It was before him now—he felt its knob under his hand though he could not see it. Hinges creaked. They could walk farther into the room that had been part of the razed mill.

Again things were changed to their eyes.

A sort of blue-green light, such as filters down to the bottom of deep water, showed them spacious floor, high ceiling, great windows—but no more in ruins. The room was suddenly fresh, solidly built, a room for living. Painted plaster, broad white sills and jambs, some furry pelts spread like rugs—and furniture. Even in the weird soft glimmer, Pursuivant knew valuable antiques when he saw them. Yonder table was such—dark, stout, gleaming. The chairs, too. The table was spread with white linen, set with silver and china. And somebody—something—was seated there, as if to eat.

The Hessian—of course. Or what had been the Hessian.

It faced them across the table. Now Pursuivant knew where the watery glow come from.

That semi-shape exuded it, like touch-wood. He could dimly make out a clarification of outline and detail—a dress coat of ancient British style, powdered hair, elegance strangely out of place upon such a brute body. The most light came from around the head, which still did not have a face.

Pursuivant began to recite once more:

"All ye evil spirits, I forbid you this man's bed, his couch—"

The blue light dimmed. The shape rose and came toward them.

"Scrope," muttered Pursuivant, between phrases of his formula. "Lights—turn them on—"

He put himself where the approaching shape would find him. "I forbid you, in heaven's name—" he continued.

Strong hands seized him, hands as cold as marsh ice. He had a sense of filth and ferocity being hurled at him. He fought back.

JUDGE KEITH PURSUIVANT was big, strong and cunning, but here was his match. It worked those cold hands to his throat, striving to shut off his breath and the words he spoke. He heard it panting and snarling, like the unknown animals of which one dreams. His own fists struck for that featureless face, battering it backward upon its cloudy shoulders, but the thing wrestled closer and closer, trying to throttle him.

"The lights—won't work!" Scrope was screaming. He struck a match, set it to a scrap of paper he whisked out of his pocket. This little torch he held aloft.

The rosy light dominated the blue, and Scrope saw plainly the thing that Pursuivant grappled. He screamed louder, and dropped the blazing paper. It floated sideways, into some sort of a wall hanging. A stronger flame leaped up. Pursuivant caught the hard, chill wrists of his enemy and tore himself free.

"—unto you and yours, in the name of Trinity!" he finished.

Then he wheeled abruptly, seized and lifted Scrope, and hurried him away. They found themselves in the parlor, the room they had known before. Behind them flames gushed and roared, like a blast furnace.

Scrope, set on his feet again, seemed

ready to faint. Pursuivant shook sense and steadiness back into him.

"Come on," he ordered. "Keep moving. Outside. This place is burning like a wicker basket."

THEY reached the outside, and Pursuivant let Alvin Scrope lean against a tree for support. He himself hurried to the double garage. He started and brought out first one, then the other of the cars, parking them at a point safe from any flying sparks or embers.

He returned to his companion. The flames now burst from the open parlor windows, licking at the clapboards and shingles outside. Snow fell but scantily, barely enough to make a hissing in the heat.

Scrope shook himself, like a dog coming out of water. He was getting command over his fear-crumbling spirit.

"Hadn't we better get to a phone somewhere?" he suggested. "There's a volunteer fire department in town—"

"No," said Pursuivant. "No fire departments. Let that house burn to the ground."

"To the ground?" Scrope's face looked stronger in the red light. "Yes, of course. You're exactly right. No more ghosts after fire. I can build again."

"Build, and be at peace. Let it burn, I say. We'll drive the cars to Scott's Meadows, and stay at the little inn there. And tomorrow you can come and stay with me at my home until you catch hold of your affairs again."

"Thanks. I will."

They fell silent. In the darkness, no longer so chilly, came a rustle of passing. A semi-shape—two semi-shapes—glided swiftly by, like puffs of smoke from the house.

Thank you, Pursuivant felt gentle cries of joy, more in his heart than in his ears. *Thank you—*

They were gone.

Scrope, too, had been aware of that passing. "I guess," he ventured, "that the spirits of those poor women are set free."

From the heart of the red rage of flame that now possessed all the house came suddenly a sound—a shout, a roar, a scream—recognizable as human and masculine.

Scrope faltered and swore. "That—was the Hessian?"

"It is what was the Hessian," agreed Pursuivant, gazing at the fire.

Another peal of sound. Full of horror—full of agony.

"Why does he stay?" quavered Scrope. "Those others thanked us for setting them free—why does he hang on there until he's burned clear loose from—" He broke off. "I know," he said, gaining command of himself again.

Pursuivant turned toward him. "What, then?"

"The women were killers—yes. But they killed for a good purpose. They knew they'd find some kind of happiness now that they're not held here. But," and Scrope, too, faced the fire, "the other thing has nothing like that to expect. He hangs onto the burning den. Because, when he leaves, it'll be for—for—"

"Something much worse," finished Pursuivant for him.

Once again the suffering voice mounted up and shook the night. Then it died to a wail, a rattle, it died to nothing. It was silent.

The flames flapped like banners of victory. They seemed cleaner and more joyous.

Pursuivant and Scrope suddenly shook hands.

DREAMER'S WORLDS—*Brilliant Novlette* by EDMOND HAMILTON

NOVEMBER

Weird Tales

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OF
THE DEAD

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The Liers in Wait

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Could it have been that Oliver Cromwell, ruthless Puritan dictator of England, used the Black Arts to win his struggle with the Cavaliers?

Here lies our Sovereign Lord the King,
Whose word no man relies on,
Who never said a foolish thing,
Nor ever did a wise one.

—*Proffered Epitaph on Charles II*
John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester
(1647-1680).

YES, Jack Wilmot wrote so concerning me, and rallied me, saying these lines he would cut upon my monument; and now he is dead at thirty-three, while I live at fifty, none so merry a monarch as folks deem me. Jack's verse makes me out a coxcomb, but he knew me not in

my youth. He was but four, and sucking sugar-plums, when his father and I were fugitives after Worcester. Judge from this story, if he rhymes the truth of me.

I think it was then, with the rain soaking my wretched borrowed clothes and the heavy tight plough-shoes rubbing my feet all to blisters, that I first knew consciously how misery may come to kings as to vagabonds. E'gad, I was turned the second before I had well been the first. Trying to think of other things than my present sorry state among the dripping trees of Spring Coppice, I could but remember sorrier things still. Chiefly came to mind the Worcester fight, that had been rather a cutting down of my poor men like barley, and Cromwell's Ironside troopers the reapers: How could so much ill luck befall—Lauderdale's bold folly, that wasted our best men in a charge? The mazed silence of Leslie's Scots horse, the first of their blood I ever heard of before or since who refused battle? I remembered too, as a sick dream, how I charged with a few faithful at a troop of Parliamentary horse said to be Cromwell's own guard; I had cut down a mailed rider with a pale face like the winter moon, and rode back dragging one of my own, wounded sore, across my saddle bow. He had died there, crying to me: "God save your most sacred Majesty!" And now I had need of God to save me.

"More things than Cromwell's wit and might went into this disaster," I told myself in the rain, nor knew how true I spoke.

After the battle, the retreat. Had it been only last night? Leslie's horsemen, who had refused to follow me toward Cromwell, had dogged me so close in fleeing him I was at pains to scatter and so avoid them. Late we had paused, my gentlemen and I, at a manor of White-Ladies. There we agreed to divide and flee in disguise. With the help of two faithful yokels named Penderel I cut my long curls with a knife and crammed my big body into coarse gar-

ments—gray cloth breeches, a leathern doublet, a green jump-coat—while that my friends smeared my face and hands with chimney-soot. Then farewells, and I gave each gentleman a keep-sake—a ribbon, a buckle, a watch, and so forward. I remembered, too, my image in a mirror, and it was most unkingly—a towering, swarthy young man, ill-clad, ill-faced. One of the staunch Penderals bade me name myself, and I chose to be called Will Jones, a wandering woodcutter.

Will Jones! 'Twas an easy name and comfortable. For the nonce I was happier with it than with Charles Stuart, England's king and son of that other Charles who had died by Cromwell's axe. I was heir to bitter sorrow and trouble and mystery, in my youth lost and hunted and friendless as any strong thief.

The rain was steady and weary. I tried to ask myself what I did here in Spring Coppice. It had been necessary to hide the day out, and travel by night; but whose thought was it to choose this dim, sorrowful wood? Richard Penderel had said that no rain fell elsewhere. Perhaps that was well, since Ironsides might forbear to seek me in such sorry bogs; but meanwhile I shivered and sighed, and wished myself a newt. The trees, what I could see, were broad oaks with some fir and larch, and the ground grew high with bracken reddened by September's first chill.

Musing thus, I heard a right ill sound—horses' hoofs. I threw myself half-downways among some larch scrub, peering out through the clumpy leaves. My right hand clutched the axe I carried as part of my masquerade. Beyond was a lane, and along it, one by one, rode enemy—a troop of Cromwell's horse, hard fellows and ready-seeming, with breasts and caps of iron. They stared right and left searchingly. The bright, bitter eyes of their officer seemed to strike through my hiding like a pike-point. I clutched my axe the tighter, and

swore on my soul that, if found, I would die fighting—a better death, after all, than my poor father's.

But they rode past, and out of sight. I sat up, and wiped muck from my long nose. "I am free yet," I told myself. "One day, please our Lord, I shall sit on the throne that is mine. Then shall I seek out these Ironsides and feed fat the gallows at Tyburn, the block at the Tower."

FOR I was young and cruel then, as now I am old and mellow. Religion perplexed and irked me. I could not understand nor like Cromwell's Praise-God men of war, whose faces were as sharp and merciless as, alas, their swords. "I'll give them texts to quote," I vowed. "I have heard their canting war-cries. 'Smite and spare not!' They shall learn how it is to be smitten and spared not."

For the moment I felt as if vengeance were already mine, my house restored to power, my adversaries chained and delivered into my hand. Then I turned to cooler thoughts, and chiefly that I had best seek a hiding less handy to that trail through the trees.

The thought was like sudden memory, as if indeed I knew the Coppice and where best to go.

For I mind me how I rose from among the larches, turned on the heel of one pinching shoe, and struck through a belt of young spruce as though I were indeed a woodcutter seeking by familiar ways the door of mine own hut. So confidently did I stride that I blundered—or did I?—into a thorny vine that hung down from a long oak limb. It fastened upon my sleeve like urging fingers. "Nay, friend," I said to it, trying to be gay, "hold me not here in the wet," and I twitched away. That was one more matter about Spring Coppice that seemed strange and not overcanny—as also the rain, the gloom, my sudden desire to travel toward its heart. Yet, as you shall

see here, these things were strange only in their basic cause. But I forego the tale.

"So cometh Will Jones to his proper home," quoth I, axe on shoulder. Speaking thus merrily, I came upon another lane, but narrower than that on which the horsemen had ridden. This ran ankle-deep in mire, and I remember how the damp, soaking into my shoes, soothed those plaguey blisters. I followed the way for some score of paces, and meseemed that the rain was heaviest here, like a curtain before some hidden thing. Then I came into a cleared space, with no trees nor bush, nor even grass upon the bald earth. In its center, wreathed with rainy mists, a house.

I paused, just within shelter of the leaves. "What," I wondered, "has my new magic of being a woodcutter conjured up a woodcutter's shelter?"

But this house was no honest workman's place, that much I saw with but half an eye. Conjured up it might well have been, and most foully. I gazed at it without savor, and saw that it was not large, but lean and high-looking by reason of the steep pitch of its roof. That roof's thatch was so wet and foul that it seemed all of one drooping substance, like the cap of a dark toadstool. The walls, too, were damp, being of clay daub spread upon a framework of wattles. It had one door, and that a mighty thick heavy one, of a single dark plank that hung upon heavy rusty hinges. One window it had, too, through which gleamed some sort of light; but instead of glass the window was filled with something like thin-scraped rawhide, so that light could come through, but not the shape of things within. And so I knew not what was in that house, nor at the time had I any conscious lust to find out.

I say, no conscious lust. For it was unconsciously that I drifted idly forth from the screen of wet leaves, gained and moved along a little hard-packed path between bracken-clumps. That path led to the

door, and I found myself standing before it; while through the skinned-over window, inches away, I heard noises.

Noises I call them, for at first I could not think they were voices. Several soft hummings or purrings came to my ears, from what source I knew not. Finally, though, actual words, high and raspy:

"We who keep the commandment love the law! Moloch, Lucifer, Bal-Tigh-Mor, Anector, Somiator, sleep ye not! Compel ye that the man approach!"

It had the sound of a prayer, and yet I recognized but one of the names called—Lucifer. Tutors, parsons, my late unhappy allies the Scots Covenantors, had used the name oft and fearfully. Prayer within that ugly lean house went up—or down, belike—to the fallen Son of the Morning. I stood against the door, pondering. My grandsire, King James, had believed and feared such folks' pretense. My father, who was King Charles before me, was pleased to doubt and be merciful, pardoning many accused witches and sorcerers. As for me, my short life had held scant leisure to decide such a matter. While I waited in the fine misty rain on the thresh-old, the high voice spoke again:

"Drive him to us! Drive him to us! Drive him to us!"

Silence within, and you may be sure silence without. A new voice, younger and thinner, made itself heard: "Naught comes to us."

"Respect the promises of our masters," replied the first. "What says the book?"

And yet a new voice, this time soft and a woman's: "Let the door be opened and the wayfarer be plucked in."

I SWEAR that I had not the least impulse to retreat, even to step aside. 'Twas as if all my life depended on knowing more. As I stood, ears aprick like any cat's, the door creaked inward by three inches. An arm in a dark sleeve shot out, and fingers

as lean and clutching as thorn-twigs fastened on the front of my jump-coat.

"I have him safe!" rasped the high voice that had prayed. A moment later I was drawn inside, before I could ask the reason.

There was one room to the house, and it stank of burning weeds. There were no chairs or other furniture, and no fireplace; but in the center of the tamped-clay floor burned an open fire, whose rank smoke climbed to a hole at the roof's peak. Around this fire was drawn a circle in white chalk, and around the circle a star in red. Close outside the star were the three whose voices I had heard.

Mine eyes lighted first on she who held the book—young she was and dainty. She sat on the floor, her feet drawn under her full skirt of black stuff. Above a white collar of Dutch style, her face was round and at the same time fine and fair, with a short red mouth and blue eyes like the clean sea.

Her hair, under a white cap, was as yellow as corn. She held in her slim white hands a thick book, whose cover looked to be grown over with dark hair, like the hide of a Galloway bull.

Her eyes held mine for two trices, then I looked beyond her to another seated person. He was small enough to be a child, but the narrow bright eyes in his thin face were older than the oldest I had seen, and the hands clasped around his bony knees were rough and sinewy, with large sore-seeming joints. His hair was scanty, and eke his eyebrows. His neck showed swollen painfully.

It is odd that my last look was for him who had drawn me in. He was tall, almost as myself, and grizzled hair fell on the shoulders of his velvet doublet. One claw still clapped hold of me and his face, a foot from mine, was as dark and bloodless as earth. Its lips were loose, its quivering nose broken. The eyes, cold and

wide as a frog's, were as steady as gun-muzzles.

He kicked the door shut, and let me go. "Name yourself," he rasped at me. "If you be not he whom we seek—"

"I am Will Jones, a poor woodcutter," I told him.

"Mmmm," murmured the wench with the book. "Belike the youngest of seven sons—sent forth by a cruel step-dame to seek fortune in the world. So runs the fairy tale, and we want none such. Your true name, sirrah."

I told her roundly that she was insolent, but she only smiled. And I never saw a fairer than she, not in all the courts of Europe—not even sweet Nell Gwyn. After many years I can see her eyes, a little slanting and a little hungry. Even when I was so young, women feared me, but this one did not.

"His word shall not need," spoke the thin young-old fellow by the fire. "Am I not here to make him prove himself?" He lifted his face so that the fire brightened it, and I saw hot red blotches thereon.

"True," agreed the grizzled man. "Sirrah, whether you be Will Jones the woodman or Charles Stuart the king, have you no mercy on poor Diccon yonder? If 'twould ease his ail, would you not touch him?"

That was a sneer, but I looked closer at the thin fellow called Diccon, and made sure that he was indeed sick and sorry. His face grew full of hope, turning up to me. I stepped closer to him.

"Why, with all my heart, if 'twill serve," I replied.

"Ware the star and circle, step not within the star and circle," cautioned the wench, but I came not near those marks. Standing beside and above Diccon, I felt his brow, and felt that it was fevered. "A hot humor is in your blood, friend," I said to him, and touched the swelling on his neck.

But had there been a swelling there? I touched it, but 'twas suddenly gone, like a furtive mouse under my finger. Diccon's neck looked lean and healthy. His face smiled, and from it had fled the red blotches. He gave a cry and sprang to his feet.

"'Tis past, 'tis past!" he howled. "I am whole again!"

But the eyes of his comrades were for me.

"Only a king could have done so," quote the older man. "Young sir, I do take you truly for Charles Stuart. At your touch Diccon was healed of the king's evil."

I folded my arms, as if I must keep my hands from doing more strangeness. I had heard, too, of that old legend of the Stuarts, without deeming myself concerned. Yet, here it had befallen. Diccon had suffered from the king's evil, which learned doctors call scrofula. My touch had driven it from his thin body. He danced and quivered with the joy of health. But his fellows looked at me as though I had betrayed myself by sin.

"It is indeed the king," said the girl, also rising to her feet.

"No," I made shift to say. "I am but poor Will Jones," and I wondered where I had let fall my axe. "Will Jones, a woodcutter."

"Yours to command, Will Jones," mocked the grizzled man. "My name is Valois Pemburu, erst a schoolmaster. My daughter Regan," and he flourished one of his talons at the wench. "Diccon, our kinsman and servitor, you know already, well enough to heal him. For our profession, we are—are—"

HE SEEMED to have said too much, and his daughter came to his rescue. "We are liers in wait," she said.

"True, liers in wait," repeated Pemburu, glad of the words. "Quiet we bide our time, against what good things comes our

way. As yourself, Will Jones. Would you sit in sooth upon the throne of England? For that question we brought you hither."

I did not like his lofty air, like a man cozening puppies. "I came myself, of mine own good will," I told him. "It rains outside."

"True," muttered Diccon, his eyes on me. "All over Spring Coppice falls the rain, and not elsewhere. Not one, but eight charms in yonder book can bring rain—'twas to drive your honor to us, that you might heal—"

"Silence," barked Valois Pemburu at him. And to me: "Young sir, we read and prayed and burnt," and he glanced at the dark-orange flames of the fire. "In that way we guided your footsteps to the Coppice, and the rain then made you see this shelter. 'Twas all planned, even before Noll Cromwell scotched you at Worcester—"

"Worcester!" I roared at him so loudly that he stepped back. "What know you of Worcester fight?"

He recovered, and said in his erst lofty fashion: "Worcester was our doing, too. We gave the victory to Noll Cromwell. At a price—from the book."

He pointed to the hairy tome in the hands of Regan, his daughter. "The flames showed us your pictured hosts and his, and what befell. You might have stood against him, even prevailed, but for the horsemen who would not fight."

I remembered that bitter amazement over how Leslie's Scots had bode like statues. "You dare say you wrought that?"

Pemburu nodded at Mistress Regan, who turned pages. "I will read it without the words of power," quoth she. "Thus: 'In meekness I begin my work. Stop rider! Stop footman! Three black flowers bloom, and under them ye must stand still as long as I will, not through me but through the name of—'"

She broke off, staring at me with her

slant blue eyes. I remembered all the tales of my grandfather James, who had fought and written against witchcraft. "Well, then, you have given the victory to Cromwell. You will give me to him also?"

Two of the three laughed—Diccon was still too mazed with his new health—and Pemburu shook his grizzled head. "Not so, woodcutter. Cromwell asked not the favor from us—'twas one of his men, who paid well. We swore that old Noll should prevail from the moment of battle. But," and his eyes were like gimlets in mine, "we swore by the oaths set us—the names Cromwell's men worship, not the names we worship. We will keep the promise as long as we will, and no longer."

"When it pleases us we make," contributed Regan. "When it pleases us we break."

Now 'tis true that Cromwell perished on third September, 1658, seven year to the day from Worcester fight. But I half-believed Pemburu even as he spoke, and so would you have done. He seemed to be what he called himself—a liar in wait, a bider for prey, myself or others. The rank smoke of the fire made my head throb, and I was weary of being played with. "Let be," I said. "I am no mouse to be played with, you gibbed cats. What is your will?"

"Ah," sighed Pemburu silkily, as though he had waited for me to ask, "what but that our sovereign should find his fortune again, scatter the Ironsides of the Parliament in another battle and come to his throne at Whitehall?"

"It can be done," Regan assured me. "Shall I find the words in the book, that when spoken will gather and make resolute your scattered, running friends?"

I put up a hand. "Read nothing. Tell me rather what you would gain thereby, since you seem to be governed by gains alone."

"Charles Second shall reign," breathed Pemburu. "Wisely and well, with thoughtful distinction. He will thank his good

councillor the Earl—no, the Duke—of Pembu. He will be served well by Sir Diccon, his squire of the body."

"Served well, I swear," promised Diccon, with no mockery to his words.

"And," cooed Regan, "are there not ladies of the court? Will it not be said that Lady Regan Pembu is fairest and—most pleasing to the king's grace?"

Then they were all silent, waiting for me to speak. God pardon me my many sins! But among them has not been silence when words are needed. I laughed fiercely.

"You are three saucy lackeys, ripe to be flogged at the cart's tail," I told them. "By tricks you learned of my ill fortune, and seek to fatten thereon." I turned toward the door. "I sicken in your company, and I leave. Let him hinder me who dare."

"Diccon!" called Pembu, and moved as if to cross my path. Diccon obediently ranged alongside. I stepped up to them.

"If you dread me not as your ruler, dread me as a big man and a strong," I said. "Step from my way, or I will smash your shallow skulls together."

Then it was Regan, standing across the door.

"Would the king strike a woman?" she challenged. "Wait for two words to be spoken. Suppose we have the powers we claim?"

"Your talk is empty, without proof," I replied. "No, mistress, bar me not. I am going."

"Proof you shall have," she assured me hastily. "Diccon, stir the fire."

HE DID so. Watching, I saw that in sooth he was but a lad—his disease, now banished by my touch, had put a false seeming of age upon him. Flames leaped up, and upon them Pembu cast a handful of herbs whose sort I did not know. The color of the fire changed as I gazed, white, then rosy red, then blue, then again white. The wench Regan was

babbling words from the hair-bound book; but, though I had learned most tongues in my youth, I could not guess what language she read.

"Ah, now," said Pembu. "Look, your gracious majesty. Have you wondered of your beaten followers?"

In the deep of the fire, like a picture that forebore burning and moved with life, I saw tiny figures—horsemen in a huddled knot riding in dejected wise. Though it was as if they rode at a distance, I fancied that I recognized young Straike—a cornet of Leslie's. I scowled, and the vision vanished.

"You have prepared puppets, or a shadow-show," I accused. "I am no country hodge to be tricked thus."

"Ask of the fire what it will mirror to you," bade Pembu, and I looked on him with disdain.

"What of Noll Cromwell?" I demanded, and on the trice he was there. I had seen the fellow once, years ago. He looked more gray and bloated and fierce now, but it was he—Cromwell, the king rebel, in back and breast of steel with buff sleeves. He stood with wide-planted feet and a hand on his sword. I took it that he was on a porch or platform, about to speak to a throng dimly seen.

"You knew that I would call for Cromwell," I charged Pembu, and the second image, too, winked out.

He smiled, as if my stubbornness was what he loved best on earth. "Who else, then? Name one I cannot have prepared for."

"Wilmot," I said, and quick anon I saw him. Poor nobleman! He was not young enough to tramp the byways in masquerade, like me. He rode a horse, and that a sorry one, with his pale face cast down. He mourned, perhaps for me. I felt like smiling at this image of my friend, and like weeping, too.

"Others? Your gentlemen?" suggested

Pembru, and without my naming they sprang into view one after another, each in a breath's space. Their faces flashed among the shreds of flame—Buckingham, elegant and furtive; Lauderdale, drinking from a leather cup; Colonel Carlis, whom we called "Careless," though he was never that; the brothers Penderel, by a fireside with an old dame who may have been their mother; suddenly, as a finish to the show, Cromwell again, seen near with a bible in his hand.

The fire died, like a blown candle. The room was dim and gray, with a whisp of smoke across the hide-spread window.

"Well, sire? You believe?" said Pembru. He smiled now, and I saw teeth as lean and white as a hunting dog's.

"Faith, only a fool would refuse to believe," I said in all honesty.

He stepped near. "Then you accept us?" he questioned hoarsely. On my other hand tiptoed the fair lass Regan.

"Charles!" she whispered. "Charles, my comely king!" and pushed herself close against me, like a cat seeking caresses.

"Your choice is wise," Pembroke said on. "Spells bemused and scattered your army—spells will bring it back afresh. You shall triumph, and salt England with the bones of the rebels. Noll Cromwell shall swing from a gallows, that all like rogues may take warning. And you, brought by our powers to your proper throne——"

"Hold," I said, and they looked upon me silently.

"I said only that I believe in your sorcery," I told them, "but I will have none of it."

You would have thought those words plain and round enough. But my three neighbors in that ill house stared mutely, as if I spoke strangely and foolishly. Finally: "Oh, brave and gay! Let me perish else!" quoth Pembru, and laughed.

My temper went, and with it my bemusement. "Perish you shall, dog, for

your saucy ways," I promised. "What, you stare and grin? Am I your sovereign lord, or am I a penny show? I have humored you too long. Good-bye."

I made a step to leave, and Pembru slid across my path. His daughter Regan was opening the book and reciting hurriedly, but I minded her not a penny. Instead, I smote Pembru with my fist, hard and fair in the middle of his mocking face. And down he went, full-sprawl, rosy blood fountaining over mouth and chin.

"Cross me again," quoth I, "and I'll drive you into your native dirt like a tether-peg." With that, I stepped across his body where it quivered like a wounded snake, and put forth my hand to open the door.

There was no door. Not anywhere in the room.

I turned back, the while Regan finished reading and closed the book upon her slim finger.

"You see, Charles Stuart," she smiled, "you must bide here in despite of yourself."

"Sir, sir," pleaded Diccon, half-crouching like a cricket, "will you not mend your opinion of us?"

"I will mend naught," I said, "save the lack of a door." And I gave the wall a kick that shook the stout wattlings and brought down flakes of clay. My blistered foot quivered with pain, but another kick made some of the poles spring from their fastenings. In a moment I would open a way outward, would go forth.

REGAN shouted new words from the book. I remember a few, like uncouth names—Sator, Arepos, Janna. I have heard since that these are powerful matters with the Gnostics. In the midst of her outcry, I thought smoke drifted before me—smoke that stank like dead flesh, and thickened into globes and curves, as if it

would make a form. Two long streamers of it drifted out like snakes, to touch or seize me, I gave back, and Regan stood at my side.

"Would you choose those arms," asked she, "and not these?" She held out her own, fair and round and white. "Charles, I charmed away the door. I charmed that spirit to hold you. I will still do you good in despite of your will—you shall reign in England, and I—and I——"

Weariness was drowning me. I felt like a child, drowsy and drooping. "And you?" I said.

"You shall tell me," she whispered. "Charles."

She shimmered in my sight, and bells sang as if to signal her victory. I swear it was not I who spoke then stupidly—consult Jack Wilmot's doggerel to see if I am wont to be stupid. But the voice came from my mouth: "I shall be king in Whitehall."

She prompted me softly: "I shall be duchess, and next friend——"

"Duchess and next friend," I repeated.

"Of the king's self!" she finished, and I opened my mouth to say that, too. Valois Pembu, recovering from my buffet, sat up and listened.

But——

"STOP!" roared Diccon.

WE all looked—Regan and I and Valois Pembu. Diccon rose from where he crouched. In his slim, strong hands was the foul hairy book that Regan had laid aside. His finger marked a place on the open page.

"The spells are mine, and I undo what they have wrought!" he thundered in his great new voice. "Stop and silence! Look upon me, ye sorcerers and arch-sorcerers! You who attack Charles Stuart, let that witchcraft recede from him into your marrow and bone, in this instant and hour——"

He read more, but I could not hear for

the horrid cries of Pembu and his daughter.

The rawhide at the window split, like a drum-head made too hot. And cold air rushed in. The fire that had vanished leaped up, its flames bright red and natural now. Its flames scaled the roof-peak, caught there. Smoke, rank and foul, crammed the place. Through it rang more screams, and I heard Regan, pantingly:

"Hands—from—my—throat——!"

Whatever had seized her, it was not Diccon, for he was at my side, hand on my sleeve.

"Come, sire! This way!"

Whither the door had gone, thither it now came back. We found it open before us, scrambled through and into the open.

THE hut burnt behind us like a hayrick, and I heard no more cries therefrom. "Pembu!" I cried. "Regan! Are they slain?"

"Slain or no, it does not signify," replied Diccon. "Their ill magic retorted upon them. They are gone with it from earth—forever." He hurled the hairy book into the midst of the flame. "Now, away."

We left the clearing, and walked the lane. There was no more rainfall, no more mist. Warm light came through the leaves as through clear green water.

"Sire," said Diccon, "I part from you. God bless your kind and gracious majesty! Bring you safe to your own place, and your people to their proper senses."

He caught my hand and kissed it, and would have knelt. But I held him on his feet.

"Diccon," I said, "I took you for one of those liers in wait. But you have been my friend this day, and I stand in your debt as long as I live."

"No, sire, no. Your touch drove from me the pain of the king's evil, which had

smitten me since childhood, and which those God-forgotten could not heal with all their charms. And, too, you refused witch-help against Cromwell."

I met his round, true eye. "Sooth to say, Cromwell and I make war on each other," I replied, "but——"

"But 'tis human war," he said for me. "Each in his way hates hell. 'Twas bravely done, sire. Remember that Cromwell's course is run in seven years. Be content until then. Now—God speed!"

He turned suddenly and made off amid the leafage. I walked on alone, toward where the brothers Penderel would rejoin me with news of where next we would seek safety.

MANY things churned in my silly head, things that have not sorted themselves in all the years since; but this came to the top of the churn like fair butter.

The war in England was sad and sorry and bloody, as all wars. Each party called the other God-forsaken, devilish. Each was

wrong. We were but human folk, doing what we thought well, and doing it ill. Worse than any human foe was sorcery and appeal to the devil's host.

I promise myself then, and have not since departed from it, that when I ruled, no honest religion would be driven out. All and any such, I said in my heart, was so good that it bettered the worship of evil. Beyond that, I wished only for peace and security, and the chance to take off my blistering shoes.

"Lord," I prayed, "if thou art pleased to restore me to the throne of my ancestors, grant me a heart constant in the exercise and protection of true worship. Never may I seek the oppression of those who, out of tenderness of their consciences, are not free to conform to outward and indifferent ceremonies."

And now judge between me and Jack Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. There is at least one promise I have kept, and at least one wise deed I have done. Put that on my grave.



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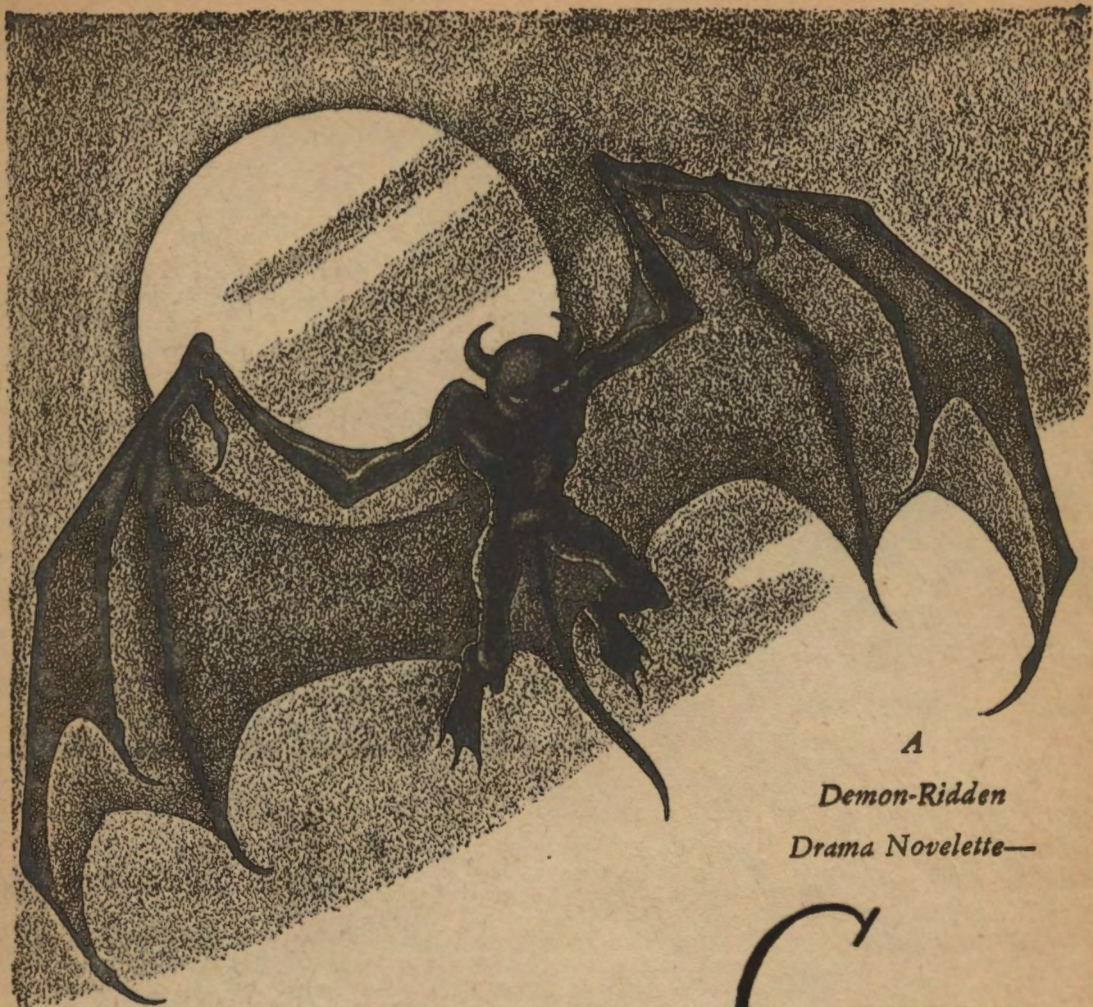
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Coven

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... They pledge themselves to frequent the midnight assemblies. These conventicles or covens were bands or companies of witches, composed of men and women, apparently under the discipline of an officer. . . .

—HISTORY OF WITCHCRAFT AND
DEMONOLOGY, *Montague Summers*.

CHAPTER I

The Cursed Damsel

WASN'T Shiloh supposed to be named after an angel or a devil? Angels and devils were both there, sorting the two armies through for who should live and who die, who go to

heaven and who go to hell. We Southerners won the first day and part of the second, even after they'd killed General Albert Sidney Johnston. When I say he was about as great as General Lee, I expect to be believed. When we fell back, Bedford Forrest sent some of us to save a field piece that Bragg's artillery left behind. But the Yankees got there fustest with the mostest men. They carried off the gun, and two or three of us Tennessee cavalry with it.

They were bivouacking on the field—sundown, April 7, 1862. I was marched

*When you hear the flip-flop of giant membranes,
and the faraway chatter of inhuman jaws. . . .*

*When you see a winged shape larger than any
creature that flies. . . . You may know that "The
Flying Horned One" is abroad—and that the
gates of hell are open!*

far back. Passing a headquarters, I saw a fateful little man with a big cigar—General Grant. With him was a taller, red-whiskered man, who was crying. Someone said he was Sherman, but Sherman never seemed to me like a man who would cry over any sorrow, his own or another's.

This introduction is jumbled. So was my mind at the time. I must have looked forlorn, a skinny gray-clad trooper plundered of saber, carbine and horse. One of the big blue cavalrymen who escorted the prisoners, leaned down from his saddle and rubbed the heel of his hand on my feebly fuzzy cheek.

"Little Johnny Reb's growing some nice black whiskers to surprise his sweetheart," he said, laughing.

"I haven't got a sweetheart," I snapped, trying to sound like a big soldier. But he laughed the louder.

"Hear that, boys?" he hailed the others of the escort. "This little feller never had a sweetheart." They mingled their cackles with his, and I wished I'd not spoken. They repeated my words again and again, tagging on sneers and merriments. I frowned, and tried not to cry. This was at dusk, the saddest time of day. We'd been marched back for miles, to some sort of reserve concentration in a tiny town.

"We've robbed the cradle for sure," the big blue cavalryman was saying to friends he met. "This little shaver—no sweetheart, he says!"

A new gale of laughter from towering captors all around me. It hushed suddenly at a stern voice:

"Bring that prisoner to me."

He rolled out from between two sheds, as heavily and smoothly as a gun-limber.



He was a short, thick man in a dragoon jacket and one of those little peaked Yankee caps. There was just enough light to show me his big beard and the sergeant's stripes on his sleeve.

"Bring him along," he ordered again. "March the others to the stockade."

A moment later, he and I stood alone in

the gloom. "What's your name?" he asked.

"High Private Cole Wickett," I replied. A prisoner could say that much. If he asked about my regiment, or the conditions of the army— But he didn't. His next question was: "How old are you?"

"Fifteen next birthday." Again no reason to lie, though I'd told the recruiting sergeant eighteen.

"Fourteen years, and some months," the big man figured it out. "Come with me."

He put a hand the size of a hay-fork on my shoulder, and steered me into a back yard full of soldiers playing cards by fire-light. He paused, and scolded them for gambling. Any sergeant in Forrest's command who had tried that would have been hooted at, maybe struck at—we Confederates respected God and General Johnston and Bedford Forrest, and scorned everyone else. But these men put away the cards and said, "Yes sir," as if he had been an officer. He marched me on into the house beyond the yard, and sat me in a chair in what had been the kitchen.

There he left me. I could hear him talking to someone in the next room. There was a window through which I might have climbed. But it was dark, and I was tired, hungry, sick, and not yet fifteen. I couldn't have fought my way back through Grant, Sherman and the rest of the Yankees. I waited where I was until the sergeant opened the door and said, "Come in here, Wickett."

THE front room was lighted by one candle, stuck in its own grease on a table. There sat a tall, gray officer with a chaplain's cross for insignia. He was eating supper—bread, bacon and coffee. My eyes must have been wolfish, for he asked if I'd have some. I took enough to make a sandwich, and thanked him kindly. Then the chaplain said, "My boy, is it true what Sergeant Jaeger heard? That you're only a child, and never had a sweetheart?"

I stuck my chin out and stood up straight. The Yankees must be worse than all our Southern editors and speech-makers claimed, if even a preacher among them made jokes about such things. "Sir," I said, keeping my voice deep in my chest, "it's none of your business."

"But it is my business," he replied solemnly, "and the business of many people. Upon your answer, Cole, depends an effort to help some folk out of awful trouble—northern and southern both—and to right a terrible wrong. Now will you reply?"

"I don't know what you mean," I returned, "but I never even thought much about girls. What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing's wrong with it," answered the big sergeant named Jaeger. "You should be proud to say that thing, Wickett, if it's really true."

"Sergeant," I sputtered, "I'm a southern gentleman. If you and I were alone, with horses and sabers, I'd teach you to respect my word."

His face grew as dark as his beard, and he said, "Respect your elders and betters, youngster. So says the Bible."

"The catechism, not the Bible, Sergeant," corrected the chaplain. "Cole, it's only that we must be dead sure." He pushed a black-bound book across the table toward me. "This is the Bible. Do you believe in the sanctity of an oath?"

"My word's good, sir, sworn on the Bible or not," I told him, but I put my hand on the book. "Must I swear something?"

"Only that you told the truth about never having a sweetheart," he said, and I did so. The chaplain put away the book, and looked at Sergeant Jaeger.

"Something tells me that we have the help we needed, and couldn't be sure of in our own forces," he said. "Take care of this boy, for we're lost without him."

He went out. Sergeant Jaeger faced me.

He was no taller than I, even then, but about twice as broad.

"Since you're a man of your word, will you give your parole?" he asked.

I swallowed the last bite of bacon, and shook my head. "I'll escape," I announced, "as soon as there's light enough."

"Will you give me your parole until sunrise?" he almost pleaded.

Wondering, I gave it. He put his hand on my shoulder again, steered me to a narrow stairway and up to a little room the size of a pantry. There was a cot with a gray blanket, Union army issue, on it.

"Sleep here," he said. "No, no questions—I won't answer them. Be ready for orders at an hour before dawn."

He left me. I took off my tunic and boots, and stretched out on the cot. Still puzzling over things, I went to sleep.

I woke to the touch of a hand, cold as a washrag, on my brow. Somehow there was light enough to see a woman standing there. She wore a frosty white dress and veil, like a bride's. Her face was still whiter.

I saw a straight, narrow-cut nose, a mouth that must be very red to be so darkly alive, and eyes that glowed green. Perhaps the eyes gave the light. I sat up, embarrassed.

"I was told to sleep here, ma'am," I said. "Is this your house?"

"Yes," she whispered, "it is my house." She sat on the edge of the cot. Her hand moved from my face to my shoulder. Her grip was as strong as Sergeant Jaeger's. "Your name is Cole Wickett. You are a brave soldier, but you never had a sweetheart."

I was tired of hearing about it. I said nothing, and she went on:

"I will be your sweetheart." And she put her arms around me.

She was beautiful, more than anyone I had ever seen. But when she came that close I felt a horrible sick fear. Perhaps

it was the smell of deadness, as of a week-old battlefield. Or all of them.

I wriggled loose and jumped off the cot. She laughed, a little gurgle like water in a cave.

"Do not be afraid, Cole. Stand where you are."

She, too, rose. She was taller than I. Her eyes fixed mine, and I could not move. If you want to know how I felt, stare for a while at some spot on the wall or floor. After a moment, you'll have trouble looking away. It's called hypnotism, or something. She came near again, and this time I did not shrink when she put her hands on my shoulders.

"Now," she said.

Then Sergeant Jaeger opened the door, took one look, and began to say something, very rapidly and roughly. It sounded like Bible verses: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God—"

The woman shrieked, high and ear-tlingling, like a bat. She let go of me.

She was gone. It was like a light being blown out, or a magic-lantern image switched from a screen.

I stared stupidly, like a country idiot. Jaeger cleared his throat, and tugged his beard. "That was close," he said.

"Who was she?" I asked, and the words had a hard time forming in my throat.

"Somebody whose call we'll return," he put me off gruffly. "She thought she'd destroy the one power we're counting on. It's time to strike back."

I FOLLOWED him outside. The night was black, but the early-morning stars had wheeled up into heaven. We passed two different sentries, and came through the sleeping street of the little town to a church, either ruined or shell-smashed. Beyond was a burying ground, grown up in weeds and walled around with stone. At the broken-down gate stood the chaplain,

He held the bridle of a chunky black stallion colt, not quite full grown.

"I can vouch for the beast," he greeted Sergeant Jaeger. "It is sad that we watch our animals so much more carefully than our own children."

"This night I almost failed in my own duty of watching," replied Jaeger in a tired voice. To me he said, "crawl out of those clothes. Don't stare. Do as I say."

By this time there had been so much strangeness and mystery that I did not argue. I shucked my uniform, and the pre-dawn air was cold on my bare skin. The chaplain motioned for me to mount. I did, and he led the colt into the burying ground.

There were wreaths and wrappings of mist. Through them I saw pale, worn-out tombstones. We tramped over them. It wasn't polite nor decent, but I saw that the chaplain and the sergeant—he came behind, carrying some shovels and a mattock—meant business. I kept my mouth closed. Riding the colt, I was steered across that burying ground, and across again.

In the middle of the second crossing, the colt planted his hoofs and balked.

Jaeger, bringing up the rear, struck with the handle of a shovel. The colt stood firm. The chaplain tugged in front, Jaeger flogged behind. The colt trembled and snorted, but he did not move.

The chaplain pointed. A grave-mound, a little naked wen of dirt among the weeds, showed just in front of the planted hoofs.

"Your book tells the truth," he said, strangely cheerful. "Here is a tomb he will not cross."

"Get down, Wickett," commanded Jaeger. "Dress, and help dig."

I hurried to the gate, threw on my clothes anyhow, and returned. The chaplain was scraping with a shovel. Jaeger swung a mattock. I grabbed another spade and joined in.

As the first moment of gray dawn was upon us, we struck a coffin lid. Jaeger

scraped earth from it. "Get back!" he grunted, and I did so; but not before he heaved up the lid with his mattock.

Inside lay the woman who had come to my cot, in her bridal dress.

"The stake," said the chaplain, and passed down a sharp stick like a picket-pin. I judged it was of hawthorn, cut from a hedge somewhere. "Strike to the heart," went on the chaplain, "while I strike at the throat."

He suited action to word, driving down the blade of his shovel. At the same moment Jaeger made a strong digging thrust with the stick. I heard again the bat-squeaking; and then, was made faint by a horrid stink of rottenness.

Jaeger slammed down the lid—I heard it fall—and scrambled out of the grave. He and the chaplain began tumbling clods into the hole.

Jaeger looked at me over his shoulder, haggard but triumphant.

"I give you back your parole," he panted. "Jump on that colt and clear out. To the west there'll be none of our troops. If you ever tell what was done here, nobody will believe you!"

I needed no second permission.

CHAPTER II

The Flying Horned One

I REMEMBERED that adventure, strangest moment of all my war-boyhood on a late night in the fall of 1876.

The wagon track I walked was frozen to rutted concrete. Wind as cold as fear rustled the tall dead grass and the naked twigs of roadside thickets. A round moon reminded me of a pancake, and I tried not to think of that or anything else to eat. It had been long since I had eaten.

The black beard prophesied me by a long-vanished Yankee captor hung thick on my jowls. I was gaunt, big-boned,

seam-faced. My clothes were torn, dirty, inadequate—overall pants, a frayed jumper, a hickory shirt that was little more than the traditional "button and frill," outworn cowhide brogans, no hat. I warmed my knucky hands under my armpits, and blew out steamy breath.

A man, hungry and weary and unsheltered, might die tonight. I wondered, without much dread, if I were at the end of my sorry trail. Other Southern veterans had died, from sheer want, after surviving the heartbreak of war and defeat. In 1865, after becoming sergeant and finally lieutenant under Bedford Forrest, the general surrender on all hands had failed to include me. I had been detached somewhere, and had gone home. There was no home—Kilpatrick's cavalry had burned the place in '64, and I found only the graves of my mother and sister. They had died of sickness, as my father had died of a minie ball at Chattanooga. After that, the black "Reconstruction" period. I had been gambler, Ku Klux raider, jailbird, chicken thief, swamp trapper. And now a tramp.

Up ahead were lights, two houses fairly close together. I knew that I was near the Missouri-Arkansas border. A loosely joined community hereabouts was called Welcome Rock. Would those lights welcome me?

As I faced them, I saw the moon clear. Something winged slowly across it.

What I say seems unreal to you, as the sight then seemed unreal to me. That winged shape must have been larger than any creature that flies; I made certain of that later.

At the moment, I saw only how black it was, with a body and legs half-human, and great bat-wings through which the moon shone as through umbrella cloth.

I told myself sagely that hunger showed me a vision.

The thing flopped around and across the moon again. I saw its ball-shaped head, with curved horns. Then it swooped

downward. Suddenly I heard the voices of men.

One laughed, another cursed. The third cried pitifully. From somewhere beyond me came strength, fury, decision. I ran heavily forward, my broken shoes heavy and clumsy. I saw the three at a distance. One was strung up by his hands to a tree's bare branch, the other two were flogging him with sticks.

I passed under other trees to approach. Their criss-cross of boughs shut away sight of whatever fluttered overhead. The captive's face showed white as curd, and the floggers seemed black. Running, I stooped and grabbed up a stone the size of my fist. When I straightened, I made out horns on the black skulls, horns like those of the flying thing. Somebody jeered: "You told on us. Now you beg us. But we—"

The two floggers were aware of me, and dropped their sticks.

"Knife," said one, and the other drew a blade from under his coat. I threw my stone, and it struck the knife-holder's black horned brow with a sound like an axe on wood. The knife dropped, and its owner sprawled upon it. I charged in after my rock.

The other man stood absolutely still. His outline could stand for a symbol of frightened surprise. He was mumbling words in an unknown tongue:

"Mirathe saepy Satonich yetmye—but it *won't work!*"

From the moonlit sky came a whickering, like a bad horse in terror. Then I was upon the mumblor.

We struggled and strove. His gabble of strange sounds had failed to do something or other. Now he saved his breath, and fought with more strength than mine. I found myself hugged and crushed in his long, hard arms, and remembered a country wrestling trick. I feigned limpness, and when he unconsciously slacked his grip, I slid down out of it. Catching him around

the knees, I threw him heavily. Then I fell with all my weight upon him, clutching at his throat.

Overhead the whickering rose shrill and shaky, and grew faint. The man I fought thrust my hands from his windpipe. I now saw that the blackness of his face, and the horns to either side, were a mask. He was wheezing, "If I get away quick, will that suit you?"

I tried to gouge his eye through a slit in the mask, but with a sudden effort he tore clear from me. Rising, he seized and dragged away the man my rock had struck down.

My strength and fury were ebbing, and I waited on one knee, watching the two flee among the brush. I glanced up. The flier was also gone.

The man who hung in bonds began to babble brokenly:

"You're free from cursing . . . free from cursing. . . ."

The knife dropped by one of the masked pair still lay on the frozen ground. I picked it up and went to the man. Cords were noosed over his thumbs, drawing him up to the branch so that his toes barely touched ground. The shirt was torn from his back, which showed a shocking mass of gore.

I cut him down, and he collapsed in my arms like a wet coat.

Then spoke a challenging voice I remembered from long ago, "What are you doing to him?"

I had breath left only to say: "Help!"

"I heard the noise of fighting, and came at once." A thick body approached in the half-light. "Bring him to my cabin."

I glanced upward, and the newcomer did likewise. "Oh, then you saw the Flying Horned One? He must have fled when I came."

"He fled before that," I said, for I had recovered a little wind. My words seemed to make the thick man start and stare, but

he made no rejoinder. We got the poor flogged wretch between us and dragged him across a field to the nearest lighted house. The moon showed me a dwelling, small but well built of adzed logs, with the chinks plastered and whitewashed. On the threshold the man we helped was able to speak again:

"This is the preacher's place. I want baptism."

"I baptized you once before," growled the burly man from the other side of him. "Once is enough, even when you backslide."

"What he wants is doctoring, not baptizing," I put in. "His back's all cut to hash."

It was all of that. But the answer was still: "Baptize me."

We helped him in. "I don't think it will hurt you," said the burly one, and as we came into the light of a kerosene lamp I saw whose voice I remembered.

THIS was the Yankee Sergeant Jaeger, whom I had last seen nearly fifteen years before, spading dirt over a woman who had seemingly died twice. He wore rough country boots and pants, but a white shirt and a string tie. He set the poor fellow in a splint-bottomed chair, where I steadied him, then went to the kitchen and returned with his hand wet. He laid the wet hand on the rumped hair.

"Peter, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, the Son—"

At his touch the tortured form relaxed, the eyes seemed to close softly in slumber. Jaeger looked across at me.

"You're a stranger to the Welcome Rock country. Or are you?"

"A stranger here, but not to you," I replied. "I'm Cole Wickett, formerly with General Forrest—at your service, Sergeant."

His eyes fixed me. He tugged his beard,

CHAPTER III

The Night Side of Preaching

which I saw had begun to thread through with gray. He opened his hard mouth twice before speaking.

"It is the same," he said then, more to himself than to me. "A strong weapon twice placed in the hands of the righteous."

The man we had saved sank almost out of the chair, and I caught him. But he was dead, and no wonder, for the beating had been terrific.

Jaeger laid him out on a strip of carpet, and caught a blanket from a cot to cover him.

"Poor Peter Dole," he muttered. "He backslid from one congregation without rebuke. When he tried backsliding from his new fellowship, it was his destruction."

I told what had happened outside in full. Jaeger did not seem particularly surprised about the bat-winged monster or the men with masks. He only said, "God grant that the baptism Peter asked for will bring him peace in the grave."

"What is this mystery, Sergeant Jaeger?" I demanded.

He waved the title away. "I am done with war. I am the Reverend Mr. Jaeger now, a poor man of God, striving with adversaries worse than any your rebel army marshalled against me—Wickett, you make a dark hour bright."

"More mystery," I reminded him. "I want explanations."

He studied me, wisely and calculatingly. "If I'm not mistaken, you are hungrier now than when we met before. Wait."

He left me alone with the blanketed corpse of Peter Dole, and I heard him busy in the kitchen. He came back with a tin plate on which were cold biscuits, sardines from a tin, and some sort of preserves.

He also brought a cup, old Union army issue, filled with hot black coffee.

"Eat," he bade me, "while I enlighten you."

"I REPEAT," began Jaeger, as I gobbled, "that your second appearance to me is in the nature of an act of Providence. How could you meet my need so aptly twice, with years and a continent in which to be lost? Probabilities against it are millions to one. Yet you've come, Cole Wickett, and with your help I'll blunt the claws of demons."

I scalded my throat with the coffee. "You promised me the story," I reminded.

"It will be short. You remember the digging up of a grave. The woman you saw was not dead, nor alive. She was a vampire."

That word is better known now, but I appreciated its meaning with difficulty. Jaeger's voice grew sharp:

"You must believe me. You were close to a fearful fate, and to me you owe life and soul—when I defended you from that monster. Let me read from this book."

He took it from a shelf above the table that served him for desk. It was old and musty, with a faded title in German. "The work of the German, Dom Augustin Calmet," he explained, and read from the cover: "A Treatise on the Appearance of Spirits, Vampires, and so on. Written a century ago. And here," leafing through it, "is the reference you will need. I'll translate, though my German is rusty."

He cleared his throat and read: "They select a pure young lad, and mount him naked on a stallion colt that has never stumbled, and is coal-black with no white hair. The stallion is ridden in and out among the graves, and the grave which he will not cross, despite hard blows, is where the vampire is buried."

He closed the book. "You begin to see what service you rendered. That part of the country was plagued by what seemed

consumption or fever—strong people sickening and dying. Only I, and that wise chaplain, saw that their lives were sapped by a vampire. Other cases have occurred in this country—in Connecticut before the war, and in Rhode Island only two years ago. Men would have scoffed at our claim, and so we acted secretly."

I accepted the honesty, if not the accuracy, of his tale. "You speak," I said, "as if I am doing you a similar service."

"You can if you choose. I saw little of your struggle this night, but enough to know that enchantment cannot touch you."

My eyes were on the blanket-draped corpse as I said, "You think that one victory begets another."

"I do." He leaned forward eagerly, the old book in his hands. "You survived one peril of the unknown. Like one who survives a sickness, you have some immunity."

I let that hang, too. "You speak as if another combat of the sort is coming."

"Again you anticipate me. The combat has now begun—here in the Welcome Rock country, from which I thought to stamp all evil worship."

The story he then told me seems to be fairly well known, at least in that community, which once was called Fearful Rock. Leaving the Union army, he came there as a frontier preacher without pay. Vestiges of an ancient and evil influence clung around a ruined house, and stories about it caused settlers to stay away. After his efforts to exorcise the apparent malevolent spirit, several farmers homesteaded nearby, and the name of the district was changed. Recently, he and the men of his little congregation had built a church.

"That started things again," he said, and I must have looked my utter stupid amazement, for he smiled sadly.

"If you study the lore of demon-worship, as I have studied it, you would know that the deluded fools must have a church at which to aim their blasphemies. Look at

the history of the defilers of the North Berwick Church in Scotland. Look at the story of the Salem witches in a minister's pasture."

"Those are only legends," I suggested, but he shook his head.

"They are true. And the truth is manifest here. I am being crusaded against. Stop and think—I defeated evil beings on their own dunghill. They were overthrown and chased out. But their black hearts, if they have hearts, yearn back to here. This place is their Unholy of Unholies."

"I see," I replied, wondering if I did. Then I glanced again at the blanket-covered thing on the carpet. Jaeger saw the direction of my glance.

"I'm coming to poor Peter Dole. It was last Sunday—five days ago. I came early to my little church. The lock was broken, the Bible tipped from the pulpit, various kinds of filth on the benches and in the aisles, and on the walls some charcoal writing. It is not fit to repeat to you, but I recognized the hand."

"Bad boys?"

"Bad men. I cleaned up the mess, and made a change in my text and sermon. I preached from Twelfth of Revelations, 'The devil is come unto you, having great wrath; for he knoweth that he hath but a short time.' I stressed the second clause of the observation."

"'He hath but a short time'," I repeated.

"Yes. I spoke of the outrage, and said that the enemy gained no victory, but only shame. I read a little further into Revelations, the part where certain people are made to hide among rocks to escape the just wrath of heaven. Then I said that I knew who had written on the walls." He eyed my empty cup. "More coffee? No?"

I shook my head. He continued.

"Peter Dole came to me after the benediction. It was he whose writing I had recognized. Terrified, he confessed some things I had already made sure of—his

membership as a very humble figure in a coven."

I shook my head, to show that I did not know what a coven was.

"It's an old-country word. Scotch, maybe. It means a gathering of thirteen witches or wizards or devil-worshippers, twelve rank-and-file, and a chief devil. Maybe that's where we got the unluckiness of the number thirteen. Peter was of the twelve rank-and-file, and he pleaded for mercy. I referred him to the Lord, and asked who were his mates. He said he'd pray courage into himself to tell me. Tonight he must have been coming to see me. And his comrades beat him to death."

"One of his comrades has wings, then," I said.

JAEGER tugged his beard thoughtfully.

"I have seen that shape against the full moon before this. Full moon-time is their meeting time, as with the underground cults of old Greece and Rome. The full moon makes wolves howl, and turns weak minds mad. I don't like the full moon. Anyway, that creature is the chief devil of which I spoke."

"Chief devil?" I repeated. "I thought that probably—"

"That probably some human leader dressed up for the part?" he finished for me. "Not here, at least. Hark!"

I, too, heard what his ear had caught—the flip-flop of great membranes, and the faraway chatter of strange inhuman jaws.

Then a knock at the door, sharp and furtive.

With shame I remember how I flinched and looked for a way out. Jaeger rose, flipped open a drawer in his work-table, and took out a big cap-and-ball revolver. He walked heavily toward the door.

Pausing with his hand on the knob, he spoke clearly:

"If you seek trouble, your search ends here. Too long have I borne with the un-



godly, meekly turning my other cheek. Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord, I will repay."

He opened the door, took one look, and lowered his weapon. A girl came stumbling in.

She wore a dark dress of coarse wool,

very full-skirted and high-necked, with edging of white at throat and cuffs. Her brown hair was disarrayed, under a knitted shawl. Her face was cream-white, set with bright, scared eyes.

"Please," she said, out of breath, "they shouted that I'd find my father with you." She swallowed, and her lips quivered. "Badly hurt, they said."

"Sit down, Susan," bade Jaeger. "He is here, but no more in pain or terror."

She saw the body then, seemed to recognize it through the blanket. Sitting down, as Jaeger had told her, she grew one shade whiter, but calm.

"I will not cry," she promised us. "I would even be glad, if I thought the curse was gone from him—"

"Then be glad, Susan," rejoined Jaeger, "for he repented and died a believer."

He turned his gaze to me. "Now will be proven, or not proven, my thought that you have strength against wickedness. For the gates of hell are open, and our enemies close in about us."

The girl Susan and I both turned toward him. He continued, with an impatient note in his voice.

"How can mankind defend himself when he does not take thought? This is Satan's one night of the year, the wizard's Christmas."

CHAPTER IV

The Gathering of the Vultures

IN THE outer night rose again the whickering cry, that rose into a shrill yearning whine. Jaeger cocked his bearded head sidewise. "The flying horned one summons his faithful. This is their day, and midnight will be their hour. Shakespeare knew that, and passes the word on to us—"The time of night when Troy was set on fire."

I looked at a little old clock of dark wood, set on a bracket. "It is past eleven

now. Have you time to tell me what you mean by the witches' Christmas?"

"Briefly, this: In ancient heathen times a festival of scorn was held, from which grew the Christian Hallowe'en—"

"But this is the middle of November!" I protested.

"Witches are simple folk. They reckon by full moons. We have one tonight, and they've crept out of their dens to do what mischief their hearts, and their demon, tells them. Beginning at my house."

He fixed his eyes on the girl. She had been sitting silent and tense, staring straight before her. "Susan," he said gently, "they sent you to find your father's body. Did they send you for any other purpose? If so—"

She rose, and lifted her hands. She spoke, slowly and questioningly, as though reciting an unfamiliar lesson:

"Mirathe saeply Satonich—"

I started and opened my mouth, to tell her where I had heard those words, earlier in the night. But Jaeger signed me to keep silent. Susan was not chanting understandably.

"Stand still, stand still! No more than a tree or a rock can you depart! This by the four elements, the seven unspoken numbers, the innumerable stars in the sky! This by the name of—of—"

Abruptly she sat down, as if utterly weary. "I can't!" she sobbed. "I can't say that name!"

Jaeger smiled, beautifully for all his broad shagginess, and stepped across to her side. He laid his hand on her head. "No decent person can, child," he comforted her softly. "They failed in the plot when they chose you for a tool."

She looked up, and faint color had come to her cheeks. Her eyes and lips had regained steadiness. She appeared to be wakened and calmed from a nightmare.

"I'll guess what happened," he went on. "Those who told you that your father was

here, also gave you a message to deliver. They spoke the words for you to repeat, making passes before your eyes—thus, eh?"

Slowly he drew his open hand through the air, as if stroking invisible fur. Susan nodded, and bit her lip.

"Several names for that," Jaeger commented to me over his shoulder. "Mesmerism, animal magnetism, hypnotism. Most occult dabblers know a little of it, would God they did not! But I had no fear of Susan, even when I saw that she was entranced. In the book of James Braid I read that nobody will do things when hypnotized that he would not do in his right mind; and, whatever her father's sad delusions, Susan is healthy and good."

Susan began to weep. "I would never have hurt you, Mr. Jaeger," she managed to protest.

"Certainly not." He touched her head again, comfortingly. "That spell was to make us both stand like posts, while the prowlers came in and did what they pleased with us.

Even had she said it in full, however, it would not work. It already failed on you, Wickett. For myself, I was silently saying the counter-charm, from this book."

He again produced a volume from his shelf, this time a sort of pamphlet in gray paper. On its cover was the title:

Pow-Wows, or Long Lost Friend

And, underneath, the picture of an owl. Jaeger flipped it open—I saw the page number, 69—and began to patter nimbly:

"Like unto the cup and the wine—may we be guarded in daytime and nighttime—that no wild beast may tear us, no weapons wound us, no false tongues injure us—and no witchcraft or enchantment harm us. Amen."

I took it that such was the counter-spell he mentioned, and thought it odd that a minister should use such a device. But

scant time for philosophy was left us. Outside voices began to laugh.

I say voices, not men. To this day I do not know just what sort of throats uttered that merriment. At the time it seemed to me that human beings were trying to sound like beasts, or beasts were trying to sound like human beings. The blending of beast and human was imperfect, and horrid to hear. Jaeger laid down the little book on the table, and again took up his revolver.

"Wickett," he said softly, "there is a window where you can watch the door. Take your post there. Watch. If they enter—and they probably will—stand still, as if the charm had worked. Because we can trap them so, as they meant to trap us."

He had no more time to prepare me, for outside there came a new chorus, this time of rhythmic recital:

"I strolled through a red forest, and in the red forest was a red church. In the red church stood a red altar, and upon the red altar lay a red knife."

A breathless moment of silence. Then a single booming voice, strangely accented, as if it echoed in a deformed mouth:

"Take the red knife and cut red bread!"

Jaeger sniffed. "Their sacrament ritual," he muttered. "A vile blasphemy. The window, Wickett."

He jerked his bearded chin toward an alcove by the door, and I moved into it. The window there looked upon the entrance from one side. Beneath the sill hung an old Chicopee saber, such as the Yankees once carried, and such as the Southern cavalry filched from enemy dead or captives. I started to draw it.

"No," Jaeger warned. "Only stay near, and seize it when they least expect. They will expect Susan to put out the light before they venture any nearer."

He bent toward the lamp, and blew strongly down its glass chimney. Its flame went out, and we were left in a sort of

bluish gloom. I could barely see Jaeger's thick body stiffen into a statue, and I imitated him, my eyes on the window.

"Move only when I do," cautioned Jaeger softly.

Outside rose more racket. Those who besieged us were plainly trying to put fire into their own hearts.

"Hola noa massa!" spoke the strange booming voice. And back came a chorus intonation:

"Janna, janna! Hoa, hoa! Sabbat, sabbat! Moloch, Lucifer, Asteroth!"

Those, I fancied, were the names of pagan gods and devils. As the last syllable died away, something came into view beyond the window glass.

With the house dark, the moon made sufficient pale radiance outside. It showed me what was approaching the door.

It was a black low shape, greened here and there as light struck it, like an expanse of old worn broadcloth. My first impression was of a monstrous flood of filthy liquid.

Then I saw that it was indeed a creeping creature, not more in solid bulk than a big man, but with outspread wings like ribbed blankets. It paused at the squared section of log that served for doorstep, and straightened up from its crouch. I could not have looked away for wealth or hope of salvation.

This was the same thing I had earlier seen flapping across the face of the moon. Now it stood upon two flat slabs of feet, like charred shingles. Its legs were long and lean, and seemed to bend backward, cricket fashion. The deep chest thrust forward prowlike—the breastbone must have been like a bird's, a protruding blade from which great muscles branched to employ those wings. For the batlike membranes would measure twenty feet and more from tip to tip, and hung from two long lumpy arms. The thing had hands, or what might resemble hands. From them sprouted the

wingribs downward, and the gaunt, sharp fingers outward.

But of face I saw nothing for all the moonlight, only an owl's roundness of skull, and two curved horns that gleamed like polished jet, and narrow green eyes like the eyes of a meat-eating animal.

It started to lift a flat foot to the step, then paused. It bent, and I knew now that it had a mouth, for it blew upon Jaeger's lock, then whickered. The door opened slowly, as if pushed by invisible hands. The entity turned and moved away.

"Enter," it boomed to whatever companions lurked behind. "Do as you have been commanded, and do it well."

I froze to immobility in my alcove. A moment later, the horde outside made a concerted rush across the threshold. With them came the ugliest and rottenest of pale lights.

CHAPTER V

The Rout of the Witches

I KNEW an instant of terror more complete and sickening than any that had been mine in the war, a worse chill than at Murfreesboro, Selma or Shiloh itself. Then the terror departed from me, and left me almost serenely strong and confident. For those who came in were only men.

They were murderous men, perhaps. They possessed ugly powers—witness that light in which they seemed to be dipped, and the chivvy commands from that being called the Flying Horned One. They were men joined for a steadfast purpose of evil. They did not simply lack ideals, morals or character, but adhered to ideals, morals and character antithetic to all I honored. They had a belief, even a form of travestied worship, that claimed them as ever pure religion claimed saints or martyrs. They had come to execute horrors upon me.

But their master had stayed outside. These, his followers, were no more than men, and as such had but muscles with which to attack, vital organs in which to receive wounds. I asked no lesser opponents than such.

Jaeger had spoken of twelve members to the coven, under rule of the Flying Horned One. The death of Peter Dole, the pitiful renegade, would leave only eleven. I think that that many came in now, and the light seemed to burst from the uplifted hand of the tallest. But my second glance showed me that the hand was not his. It was a five-fingered candle or taper, fixed by the wristlike base upon a tin plate, and each of the fingers sprouted a kindled wick.

I had lost sight, though not thought, of Susan. She stood near Jaeger, and came forward. One of the throng whooped in laughter—his voice was muffled by his mask and thickened by alcohol—and confronted her.

"She did it, good girl! She bound them!" He turned upon the motionless form of Jaeger. "Why aren't you preaching, Parson? Walloping the pulpit and quoting chapter and verse? Pretty quiet and stiff, ain't you?"

He drew a straight dagger like the one drawn against me at the scene of the flogging.

"Take the red knife," he quoted unsteadily, "and cut red bread!"

"Wait," interposed the tall man who held the five-fingered light. "There's something to do first. There lies some dead clay under the blanket yonder. I'd guess it for what's left of Dirt Fire, known to men as Peter Dole."

Dirt Fire. Dirt Fire—I had heard somewhere of how witches, upon joining the circle, were baptized mockingly to new names. That had befallen Peter Dole, and he had asked for a second baptism to clear his soul of the horror he felt. The tall one

passed his tin plate, with the light, to a pudgy figure who must have been a woman, masked and in men's rough riding clothes. Then he took a step toward Susan and towered over her.

"You've served us well," he spoke. "Our coven is one short. You will fill the emptiness."

There was no asking of her whether she wanted to. Perhaps some quick instruction by Jaeger had prepared her for this. In any case, she voiced neither acceptance nor refusal. She only faced the tall masked man, silently and gravely.

"Thirteen we shall be, counting our master," intoned the tall one. "Susan Dole, say after me the words I now repeat."

He lifted a hand, and made the stroking gesture in air that Jaeger had called "hypnotic." Susan drew herself up. The spell seemed to be catching hold of her on the instant.

Just then, Jaeger made a little twitching motion with the right hand that had hung quietly at its side. That hand held his revolver, unnoticed by the invaders. Fire spurted, powder exploded. The tall hypnotist seemed to somersault sidewise, and banged down on the floor to lie without a quiver.

I had been like a hound on leash all this while, forcing myself to wait for the cue of Jaeger's first move. Now, before the sharp echo of the revolver-shot died in that room, I had flung out my left hand and snatched the saber from its fastenings by the sill. My right hand brought it from the sheath with a loud rasp of metal. I gathered my legs under me and leaped at the man with the drawn dagger.

He knew I was coming, somehow or other. For he turned, trying to fend me off with that straight blade he had meant for Jaeger. My first axelike chop broke his steel close to the hilt. My second assault, a drawing slice, severed muscles, arteries and tendons at junction of neck and shoul-

der. Down he went at my knee, the gushing blood all black and shiny in that pallid light. I stepped across him, and into the melee that had sprung into being around Jaeger.

No less than myself, those invaders must have been keyed up to expectation of violence. When Jaeger's first shot felled their comrade, they threw themselves upon the sender of that shot. A big mask-wearer came in under the revolver muzzle, stood up under a terrific blow with the barrel, and grappled Jaeger. Others seized him by the arms, beard, throat, legs. They were pulling him down, as dogs pull down a bear. The pudgy one who held the five-fingered light stood apart, drawing another of those straight daggers. The look of the hand that held the dagger convinced me more than ever that here was a woman in men's garments.

Coming upon the press, I slid my saber-point into the back of the big fellow whose arms were around Jaeger. He subsided, coughing and struggling, and I cleared my weapon in time to face another who quitted his assault on Jaeger to leap at me. He tried to avoid my slash, and I smote his jaw with the curved guard that enclosed my knuckles. He sprawled upon a comrade, and both fell.

Then Jaeger, fighting partially free, fired two more shots. One of his attackers fell limply, and another flopped away, screaming and cursing by the names of gods I did not recognize.

The light-holder now gave tongue in a shrill warning:

"Betrayed, we're betrayed! Run! Get away!"

THOSE who could respond did so. Jaeger fired yet again, his fourth bullet. The last of those who fled was down, floundering awkwardly to crawl across the hewn log outside the door. Two of the others caught the squirming body

and dragged it clear. We were suddenly alone.

"Don't close that door," said Jaeger from the dimness that fell again—for the five-fingered light had been knocked down and extinguished. "I doubt if we need to be fenced in from them." He was kindling his own kerosene lamp, that gave a healthier radiance. "Count the dead, Wickett."

I did so, noting that all wore coats or jackets turned inside out. Two had perished by my saber, two more by Jaeger's bullets, while a third whom he had shot, died even as I bent over him. The man I uppercutted with the saber-hilt was still alive and breathing heavily, but quite unconscious. I reckoned the one dragged away must be badly hurt, if not also dying.

"We killed or wounded seven," was my report. Jaeger had led Susan to one side, where she might not look. Then he went from one body to the other, pulling away their horned masks of dingy black cloth. At the sight of each face he grunted his recognition.

"All of them are my neighbors," he announced, "and all of them in my congregation, or pretending to be. Look Wickett! This one is a woman—she and that first man you sabered were husband and wife. I would have spared her had I known her sex. But here is one who seems to be awakening."

The single survivor sat up. He fingered his bruised chin, waggling it tenderly. His face, unmasked, looked long and sharp and vicious. His small, dark eyes burned as they fixed upon Susan.

"She tricked us," he accused, spitting blood.

"It was I who tricked you," corrected Jaeger. "Stand up, Splain. But make any sudden move, and I will fire one of the two bullets still in this revolver." He held it up significantly.

The captive stood up. Like the others, he wore his coat inside out. "My name

isn't Splain any more," he stated, with a show of defiance. "Now I'm called—"

"Spare us what foolish name your devil master gave you," interrupted Jaeger sharply. "I know most of that stupid ritual, that you think so frightening—another baptism, another book of prayer, another submission to mastery. I will call you Splain, and to that name you will answer, if you hope for mercy. Take off that coat, and put it on properly."

"You can't make me," flared Splain.

Jaeger pocketed the revolver, caught Splain by a shoulder, and shook him like a rug in a high wind. Splain squealed, cursed, and fumbled inside his coat. But Jaeger pinned his wrists, gave it a wrench, and a knife fell to the floor.

"I've seen this kind of knife before," I said, picking it up.

"Yes, several like it," agreed Jaeger. He had shaken the resistance out of Splain, had roughly dragged the reversed coat from him, and was now turning it back as it should go. "Get into this, Splain. . . . Yes, so. Clothing turned inside out was an invulnerability charm as long ago as the Egyptian Pharaohs, but it did not protect you. Wickett, I judge that it is a magic dagger, so-called, that you hold. Potent against all enemies that are not prepared."

"It looks home-made," I ventured, examining the weapon.

"Of course. Each wizard must make his own knife, hand-forging it of metal never before used. The blade is inscribed? In strange characters? I thought so."

WE PICKED up four other knives, including the one I had broken, from the floor. Jaeger gathered them on a table, also the plate with the extinguished five-fingered taper.

"A poor imitation," he said of this last object. "The hand of glory, cut from a hanged murderer's arm, is supposed to

shed light and strike victims numb. Having no hanged murderer convenient, these made a dummy of wax. It failed against us as other charms have failed."

He smiled grimly at Splain. "Had the blades been simple and honest, your friends might have killed us. But they were enchanted—and useless. Get out, Splain."

"Out?" repeated the other stupidly.

"Yes. Seek that monster you call your lord, who thought a poor minister of God could not plan and fight a battle. Tell him that I prophesy his defeat. Six of the eleven he sent against us have died. The souls and bodies of the remainder are his responsibility. I shall require them at his hands. You obey?"

"Yes, Parson," grumbled Splain. He shambled toward the door.

Green fire suddenly played about him, like many little lightnings, or some display of fireworks. Splain shuddered, sagged, crumpled. He, too, was dead, the seventh to perish on the floor of Jaeger's front room.

Jaeger looked at him, at me. Then he whistled in his beard.

"So much for a defeated wizard," he commented pithily. "In some way the Flying Horned One knew of Splain's failure, and he has no use for failures."

He had produced his revolver once more. Flipping the cylinder clear, he drew the two charges remaining. Then he carefully loaded the gun afresh. From a box in the table drawer he took the bullets, pale and gleaming.

"Those look like silver," I said.

"They are silver. The sovereign weapon against wicked creatures which are more and less than human."

"You are going to shoot at the Flying Horned One?"

"No, Wickett," said the Reverend Mr. Jaeger, and put the weapon into my hand. "You are."

CHAPTER VI

The Five Silver Bullets

JAEGER'S talk about the influence called hypnotism came back to my mind later, when I found myself outside in the chill moon-glow, the revolver in my right hand, moving with quick stealth toward a distant sound of mouthy misery.

Of me he had made a champion, in this frontier strife of angels good and bad. Reiterating his insistence that my share in that uncanny adventure after Shiloh had made me somewhat immune to evil magic, he had given me the revolver and sent me forth. Where? And to do what? My head was clearing now, as after too much drink. I began to ponder the recent events with something of disgusted wonder at my own readiness to mix into what was surely no business of mine.

After all, I was strange in this Welcome Rock country. I had had no idea of staying more than the night through. I had no practical interest in any quarrels there, even quarrels incited by demons. But from the first I had taken a hand—charging those who flogged Peter Dole, wielding a saber in the parson's parlor, and now stepping forth, gun in hand, to seek and battle the Flying Horned One.

I told myself that I was a fool. I entertained the thought of finding the through trail and tramping away from Welcome Rock. There were silver bullets in the gun. They might have some cash value to buy me breakfast, miles away—

The cries grew louder. They rose from beyond one of the leafless thickets that banded the country. From that point also came a musty glow of the green cold light. I heard a voice:

"No! We did our best! Don't!"

Something struck, hard and heavy. The voice broke away from the words into a scream of agony.

As at the flogging earlier that night, I quickened my pace to a run. I was fully prepared to meddle yet again.

Beyond two or three belts of trees I came in sight of a round cleared space. Away off to one side rose the dark pinnacle that once had been called Fearful Rock, in whose shadow had been done strange matters. I lurked inside the thicket, watching what happened in the open.

There were gathered my late adversaries, only four of them now. They were wailing, posturing and wriggling, as though blows fell upon them. But it was well away from them that the punishment was dealt. There stood the Flying Horned One, or perhaps he hovered—in any case his feet touched the ground, and his wings may have fluttered slightly to hold him erect. From him came the unpleasant light. He was striking again and again with a stick, at dark objects that lay limp on the ground.

"No! No!" the voices begged him. "Strike no more, master!"

He ceased the blows, and flourished the stick at them. "You have had enough?" he demanded, in that uncouth horselike voice of his.

They assured him, tearfully, that they had.

"Then obey. Go back and kill—"

"We have no powers, no powers!" cried the plump woman who had held the five-fingered candle.

Her misshapen ruler made an impatient fluttering gesture with his umbrella wings. "This, I think, is your coat," he said, and touched with the point of his stick one of the dark objects on the ground. I saw then that these objects were garments, cloaks or coats. The woman squealed and clasped her hands.

"Don't beat on me again!" she sobbed.

To my mind came one of the most familiar legends about witches, the one about hurting at a distance. The wax

image or portrait pierced with needles, the hair or nail-clipping burnt—yes, and the discarded garment beaten. I was seeing such a thing done.

"Abiam, dabiam, fabiam," babbled the monster over his stick. It was a conjuration of some sort, I guessed; indeed, Jaeger told me later that a similar spell is included in Albertus Magnus. "True you speak," he continued. "But you are bad servants." I saw his long green eyes glitter. "Perhaps I should discard you and get others. You who summoned me among you, step forward."

A fragile, oldish man came away from the others. His mask had been torn, probably in the fight, and his skin showed corpse-pale through the rent.

"I did according to the law and the books," he quavered. "If we have served you badly, it was because we did not know how to serve. Teach us."

The Flying Horned One put his arm-like upper limbs, that bore the wings, akimbo. The membranes drooped around him like an ugly living shawl. "You never asked if I wished to leave my own world," he charged fiercely. "You did not wait to think if I was happy there or not. You haled me in among strange things and thoughts. You talk about serving me, but you meant that I should serve you. Huh? Deny it if you will!"

They did not deny it. I gathered that he referred to some ceremony which had brought him into existence among them. Of such things, too, I had heard.

Again he addressed the thin oldster. "Do as you did when you summoned me."

There was a moment of scared silence. Then, "You mean the circle, master? And the pentacle?"

"You will be sorry if I command you twice," said the Flying Horned One.

The magic-maker hopped and fluttered like a frightened rabbit to obey. Stooping, with his dagger in hand, he traced on

the ground a figure like a shallow-pointed star, about three yards across. As he did so he mumbled words, apparently one for each point. "Gaba," he said loud enough for me to hear, and again "Tetragrammaton." The other words I did not catch. Having finished the star, he traced a circle outside it. His comrades all moved back, but the winged monster hovered near, in some eagerness.

"Shall I say the rest?" quavered the circle-tracer.

"Not unless you wish to bring me a brother among you," replied the Flying Horned One, and it was plain that his hearers had no such wish. "Say only the first part."

There came forth a flood of gibberish, spoken by the old man with both forefingers uplifted. The others joined in briefly at the end, chanting as if at prayer. I saw the lines that the knife had marked suddenly grow more plain and hot-looking—the star was outlined as in rosy brightness, like a figure of heated wire; and the circle gleamed blue-green, like a tracing of phosphorus.

"Look!" commanded the winged master, in a voice that made my flesh change position on my bones. "Is it—"

"The door!" hoarsely finished the magician. "It is ready to be opened unto us."

"Yes," agreed the Flying Horned One. "Opened unto you. Speak on."

The magician fronted his glowing diagram. His words became spaced and cadenced, like verse from some ponderous tragedy:

"Fear is stronger than love!

"Serve those above with joy! Serve those below with terror!

"For those above, a sacrifice of one white sheep! For those below, a sacrifice of two black sheep!

"For those above, a sacrifice of one white slave! For those below, a sacrifice of two black slaves!"

"The door opens," the others intoned.

It was more like a wall, dark and gloom-clotted, that showed itself in the center of the star-circle diagram. From it rose, lazily, a thin little veil of vapor.

"Enough," decreed the Flying Horned One, and suddenly shot out his two upper talons to seize the shoulders of the magician.

I heard a thin choking squeal for mercy. The Flying Horned One lowered his wings about the man he had grasped, and I could only guess what happened to that man under their jagged shadow. It was sufficiently horrible, I make no doubt. Lifting the revolver, I fired my first shot.

It missed its mark, for I heard it strike a tree-trunk beyond. The three companions of the magician heard my shot and turned toward its sound. Not so the monster who ruled them, for he extended his wings and with a single beat of them rose into air. In all four of his talons he gripped the limp form of the magician. I am sure that I saw blood on that form—dark wetness, anyway. Two great flops carried the victim above the diagram and its inner opening. The talons let go, and the body fell into the hole, away from sight.

"Ohhh!" intoned the others, as if it were part of the ritual. Probably they were entranced, half delirious, unable to see their peril. Their lord flew back at and among them.

"In after him," he grunted, and seized two of them by their necks.

I fired a second shot, more carefully. It tore a hole through one of those wing membranes. For a moment I saw the tear, quite large and ragged, and moonlight through it. Then the Flying Horned One had dashed his two captives at the hole, one after the other. They vanished. I could swear that the hole gulped at and seized them, like a hungry, knowing mouth.

I came into the open, firing twice more. But my hand trembled, and both bullets

went wide. This revolver, with which Jaeger had killed so coolly and capably at our earlier fight, was doing very little for me. Then I ran close. The Flying Horned One had seized the last of his worshippers, the fat woman, and twitched her in front of him as I fired a fifth time.

She caught my bullet, and whether it inflicted a slight or serious wound I cannot say. The Flying Horned One whinnied, and tossed her after the others. She, too, was vanished. I faced the dark winged silhouette, with not a dozen yards between us.

"You, too, have power," the inhuman voice addressed me levelly. "Power, but not wit. Do not use the weapon again, it is empty."

That much was truth. Jaeger had loaded it with five charges, the hammer being down on an empty chamber. I poised the gun to use as a club, and came slowly forward. The winged form moved to meet me.

"You have escaped," and the voice was scarcely more than a whisper. "Nothing that I said, or my slaves did, harmed you. Man, have you lived in more worlds than one, like me?"

I made no reply. I could think of none. Two talons reached out to clutch at me.

Then we struggled and fought. He tore at my face and at my chest, as though he would rend my flesh away. I struck with my fists and the clubbed revolver, but made no impression. His substance did not seem to have any true resistance, yet I knew that he had strength and weight.

"At my leisure, in another place—I will examine you," he told me, and heaved me toward the glowing diagram.

I grabbed him close to the elbow-joints, and we both fell heavily toward the black hole.

I struck the ground first, and there was a flash of fire, real or imaginary. Too, there was a little breathless shriek, out of the

dark face of my adversary. Suddenly all weight and grip was gone from me.

I set up. The diagram was no more than knife-edges in the moonlight. The hole—there was no hole any more, only hard earth. Of the Flying Horned One was nothing to be seen.

Jaeger, then had been right. Power to resist evil magic kept me safe. Endeavoring to carry me away, the Flying Horned One had fallen alone into the hole and had, so to speak, pulled the hole in after him.

Rising, I wondered if I should consider myself the victor.

CHAPTER VII

The Grave-Digging

THE morning sun was warm, invigoratingly so. Jaeger and I strove, with grubbing hoe and shovel, at earth that was no longer frozen to stony hardness.

"Make the grave wide, but not too shallow," he directed as he toiled. "Seven must go into it. I wonder if I can spare blankets enough to wrap them all."

"Will nobody ask questions?" I demanded. "Have they no friends or families?"

"Their friends and families will know that fate overtook them, but not in what form," replied Jaeger. "If no corpse shows above earth, I will not be required to explain anything. That is the way of the law hereabouts, and it is well. Wrestlings with demons do not court publicity."

I reflected that, after all, here was a wild and unwatched country. It was no more than four or five years since many more persons had been killed in Kansas by the Bender family, and the detection had come only by the slimmest of chances. Jaeger seemed confident that the matter was as good as closed."

"I shall read a prayer for them all," he

took up the subject again. "God knows that few men have needed prayers more, but I do not despair of their souls. They were only misled, not wicked of their own wish."

I wiped my face on my sleeve. "Didn't they flog Peter Dole to death?" I reminded. "Didn't they come to kill us?" Didn't—"

"All at the bidding of the Flying Horned One. He had bound them in a spell. But he is gone, and I doubt if he ever comes again to Welcome Rock." Jaeger was speaking triumphantly. "His reception was calculated to daunt even a demon."

"Demon," I repeated. "Mr. Jaeger, tell me now, simply and shortly, what sort of a person a demon is?"

"No sort of person. For a demon is not born on Earth, nor does it die there. It comes from another place."

"From hell, yes."

"Perhaps from the place we think of as hell. What that place is like I cannot tell you, nor could any other man—not even if the Flying Horned One's betrayed servants returned to life. For we live and behave in but one sphere, with no conception of others. Yet, if another sphere could touch ours by accident or purpose, and beings come from it to us—"

He paused, and let the rest of the explanation grow in my own mind.

I considered the bizarre possibility. We of this life are two-legged things with blood in our veins, appetites to satisfy, hopes and duties to impel our actions. Basic concepts of nature as we know her make us all brothers. This is what we call the universe, this tiny handful of objects experienced through our few senses and imaginations.

But another universe, wherein not only beings and viewpoints and constructions are different, but the very elements of them—had that spawned the Flying Horned One?

Perhaps his very appearance, strange

though it seemed, was only his effort to conform with a new state of affairs. Perhaps his original impulses had been influenced by the worship paid him, and by the expectations of the worshippers. Perhaps he had thought of himself as neither good nor evil, but doing something which partook of neither quality. He might have been the least proper item by which to judge that stranger universe.

But I had no desire to visit such a place, or to encounter others of its creatures.

"Of morals to be drawn from our experience, there are perhaps a thousand," Jaeger resumed. "One, however, I shall build into a sermon. My text shall be, 'He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.'"

"From Ecclesiastes," I said.

"What I shall say is that a fascinating study can sometimes do more harm than good, especially to the careless. What hopes must that poor fellow have had, who drew a diagram and clumsily performed a ceremony he could not understand—thereby

opening a trapdoor to another sphere and admitting the Flying Horned One to ours!"

"He went to the Flying Horned One's sphere, and his knowledge is painfully increased," I reminded.

"Can you say for certain to what sphere they went? Perhaps they have blundered into yet another manner of living, bringing strangeness and pain with them."

We had finished our digging. Jaeger looked toward the house.

"Smoke is coming up the chimney. Susan has made some sort of breakfast for us. After that, to bury the dead."

"And after that?" I prompted. "I am too tired to move on just yet."

Jaeger smiled.

"Why move on at all? There are empty acres here. Nobody will discourage a young man who wants to settle down, work, and rebuild his fortune. If you are lonely, notice that Susan Dole is beautiful and helpful."

But I had already noticed that.

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The Third Cry to Legba

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Suddenly I was aware of great shapes moving in the rain, and heard the sound of voices that were not of my city nor yet of any that I ever knew.

—LORD DUNSANY,
The Madness of Andelsprutz.

THE glare and the clatter died at the same instant throughout the Club Samedi. Even the buzzing crowd-noise suspended in expectation. Behind the orchestra sounded a gong. Once. Twice. Thrice. . . .

The master of ceremonies intoned:

"Midnight. The witching hour. And Illyria!"

The gong chimed on to twelve, and stopped. A clarinetist piped certain minor notes. A mixed quartet began to croon:

"Ibro mahnda . . . ibro mahnda. . . ."

A spotlight, dim and brownish, bored through the smoky air. Into it paced a black-robed figure, bowed face hidden under cascading black locks. To the center of the dance floor moved the silent, slow shape. *"Ibro mahnda . . ."* breathed the quartet.

A sudden explosive gesture. The robe swirled away, the head lifted. There stood a woman, a long-limbed dancer figure, clad as scantily as night clubs permit. Her face was lovely, tense, rapt. Her eyes burned out of slant sockets. The clarinet squealed louder, a tom-tom slogged into rhythm. The dance began, grotesque, nimble, quickening.

The dancer's flower-mouth spewed out words, soft and solemn:

*"Legba choi-yan, choi-yan Zandor—
Zandor Legba, immole'—bai!"*

Louder sang the dancer called Illyria, and louder grew the quartet's obligato—
"Ibro mahnda, ibro mahnda. . . ."

Illyria spun her body. Her flying hair strained outwards in a bushy umbrella. Her arms writhed like snakes, seeming to glide caressingly over her body. Her bare, rouged toes clapped out a pattern of sound in time with the drumbeat. She sang always:
"Zandor Legba, immole'—bai!"

And suddenly she froze into a strange, updrawn statue, face lifted, hair back, arms out. At the same instant all the music hushed. A tuxedoed attendant stole into the spotlight's brown glow, holding out a fluttering something—a rooster, speckled black and white. Greedily Illyria seized it, her long, strong hands clutching. The sickening crackle of broken bones was audible. She dropped the rooster, which flopped spasmodically. The attendant seized it and backed away. Illyria snatched her cloak and sped out of sight. Lights came up, the orchestra played a gay flourish.

"You've just seen an authentic voodoo dance-ritual," blatted the master of ceremonies into his microphone. "Never done before, except in a real meeting of the cult—but it'll be done tomorrow midnight, and the midnight following, and every midnight after that. . . ."

John Thunstone's table was well back from ringside. He was a man almost

Heading by FRED HUMISTON

*The keeper of the Gate must be invoked to open the way between worshiper
and other-world; the password is a voodoo sacrifice.*



too big to be reassuring, and most of his clothes had to be tailored especially for him. His hands and eyes were sensitive, his big nose had been twice broken, his black hair and mustache showed a little streaking of gray. He sat as relaxed as a big contented cat, and sipped his highball. His eyes gazed somehow hopefully at his companion.

She was as blonde as John Thunstone was dark, of medium height and of figure both full and fine. Above her dark velvet gown her bare shoulders and arms were creamy white. Her large, level eyes shone bluer than the sapphires at her ears and throat. Her lips smiled without parting, in the manner associated with the Mona Lisa and the Empress Josephine. "Was it what you expected, John?" she asked gently.

He rocked his big, close-combed head in what might have been yes or no. "It gave the impression of authenticity," he temporized. "Not that I'm well grounded in voodoo."

"You always were sunk deep in occultism and magic," she rallied him. "Deeper than you'd admit to anyone. Even to me."

He looked at her sidelong. "And you were piqued, eh? Enough to go abroad because you thought I wasn't telling you all I should of my studies—to go abroad and marry Count Montesecco—"

"Which is past, and not particularly nice to bring up."

He sipped again. "I never meant to snub you, Sharon. Not then or now. But the little I know of magic spells danger. And I don't want to let anyone in for it. Least of all you. I hope you don't still condemn me."

Her small hand crept across to touch his big one. "I'm with you tonight. Isn't that enough?"

He looked as if it wasn't, and listened to the dance music. Then: "No, I'm not

well grounded in voodoo. Don't understand it at all. Neither, I suspect, do the voodoo worshipers themselves. After all, what is voodoo? African jungle worship, or modified European witchcraft, or both—or neither?" His eyes seemed to study something unseen to any but himself. "Did you hear the words of that ritual?"

"French, or French patois, weren't they?" suggested the lady he called Sharon. "That quartet sang something like '*ibro mabnda*.' Mightn't they mean '*hereux monde*'—happy world?"

"Or perhaps '*ira au monde*'—roughly meaning, 'it shall happen to the world'."

"Which I call ingenious interpretation," said a voice beside the table, a voice soft, deep and gently amused.

Thunstone shot up out of his chair with that abrupt transition from relaxed ease to ready action which sometimes irritates his friends. He faced someone as tall as himself, and broader, almost deformedly deep of chest. Above European-cut dress clothes and jeweled studs not in the best of taste rode a huge high-craniumed head, either bald or shaven, with a grand hooked nose and eyes as gray and cold as frozen milk.

"I am also an enthusiast for voodoo," said the newcomer silkily. "May I introduce myself? Rowley Thorne."

He offered a big, over-manicured hand. Thunstone took it.

"I'm John Thunstone. Countess, may I present Mr. Thorne? The Countess Montesecco."

ROWLEY THORNE gracefully kissed her fingers. Without waiting to be invited, he sat down in a chair between them. "Waiter! Champagne, I think, is best traditional usage for cementing of new friendships."

The champagne was brought. Rowley Thorne toasted them, and his gray eyes narrowed over the glass. "I was sitting almost back of you, and heard your won-

derings about this Illyria and her dance. I can help a little, I have traveled in Haiti. Yes, the ritual is authentic, an invocation of Legba."

"Legba?" echoed the Countess. "A voodoo god?"

"One of them. Damballa is more important, and Erzulie perhaps more picturesque. But Legba is the great necessity. He's keeper of the Gate—must be invoked to open the way between worshiper and other-world, to permit prayers to mightier gods. It's like speaking a password. Impressive, that bit with the fowl. Other voodoo sacrifices are killed by cutting the throat. Legba's sacrifices die of a broken neck."

The Countess shivered, and Thunstone saw. "Suppose we change the subject," he said.

"Suppose we don't," she rejoined warmly. "Mr. Thorne is willing to talk of magic, though you aren't. And I'm fascinated. Tell us more about Legba, Mr. Thorne."

"He's said to be a shaggy or furry creature with red eyes. He's also called Baron Cimmiterre—master of the graveyard—and Baron Carrefours—master of crossroads. The prayer to him for opening the gate is always preliminary to a prayer elsewhere."

The Countess' blue eyes were bluer. "And what can Legba, Baron Cimmiterre, Baron Carrefours, do for a worshiper?"

"He can but open the gate," said Rowley Thorne. "Hark, music—Latin American. Will the Countess honor me?"

Thunstone rose and bowed them away from the table, but did not sit down again. As the Countess danced off with Rowley Thorne, he swiftly skirted the outer fringe of tables, spoke earnestly to the head waiter, offering some bills. The head waiter led him to a side passage indicating a row of dressing room doors. "Number two, sir," he said and Thunstone knocked.

"Who is it?" asked a woman's voice from within.

"Press," said Thunstone. "After a feature story."

The door opened. Illyria smiled there, hastily wrapped in a robe of flowered silk. "Come in, Mr.—"

"Thunstone."

He entered. She gave him a cordial hand, and sat down by her dressing table. "What paper, Mr. Thunstone?"

"I write for magazines and syndicates," he said truthfully. She accepted a cigarette from his case, and he went on: "I'm interested in your voodoo dance."

SHE chuckled. "Oh, that. I was in Martinique a year ago. My doctor said I had to have fresh salt air and warm weather. Martinique was cheap, and I was broke—don't print that, though. Say I was fascinated enough to join the voodoo cult. Because I was."

"Many white people in it?" asked Thunstone.

"Quite a few. But I think I was the only practical one. I knew I could make a sensation with voodoo stuff. And haven't I? Before this season's up, I'll be signed for a revue. After that, maybe stardom."

Thunstone looked at a bright print on the wall. "Isn't that a saint's picture—John the Baptist?"

"It is and it isn't." Illyria smiled at his blank look. "The voodoo people want pictures of their gods, to use for idols. The best they can do is regular holy pictures. For Damballa they use St. Patrick—because of the snakes. And John the Baptist is the hairiest, so they take him for Legba. That print was given me by the *boungon*, the medicine man you can call him, when he got real pictures."

"Real pictures?" echoed Thunstone.

"Some artist was making them, someone on Haiti. The Legba one would scare a top sergeant." She shrugged her shoulders

out of the robe in a mock shudder. "The artist's name was Thorne."

Thunstone stared. "Rowley Thorne?"

"Maybe. Rowley or Roland or something. I never met him, he stayed close to the big shots in Haiti. Now, what publicity pictures will you want?"

"Later," he said. "May I call again? Thanks."

He returned to his table, just as the Countess and Rowley Thorne finished their dance.

"Jealous?" smiled the Countess Montesecco in the homeward taxi. "Miffed because I found Mr. Thorne attractive?"

"Should I be?" Thunstone smiled back. "He was informative about voodoo."

"Wasn't he, though? No mock-mysterious puttings off on his part. He wants to explain all the things you've held out on me." Her smile grew wistful. "Men usually like to talk to me, about themselves and their interests. You're different from them all."

"Different, I hope, from Rowley Thorne."

"Which sounds as if you know more about him than you admitted. Here's my apartment house. Come upstairs and tell me about him."

"I'll come up," said Thunstone, "but I'll not talk about Rowley Thorne. Because he's part of the magic that the world had better not know about."

TRUE to his stated policy, Thunstone did not ask the Countess to go back with him to the Club Samedi on the following night. But as he entered, after 11 o'clock, he wished he had. For she sat at a choice table, well forward to the floor show, with Rowley Thorne.

The lights seemed to blur, and the torch singer at the microphone—loud though she was—faded into the back of his consciousness; but he was sure he betrayed nothing of being startled or disappointed as he

moved between the tables and Rowley Thorne stood up with a gentle smile of greeting.

"Mr. Thunstone, I was a guest at your table last night. Sit at mine tonight. Sharon said that she was sure you would come."

Sharon, he had said. They were at first names, she and Rowley Thorne. He looked down at her and said, "It's so nice to see you again. Thanks, Thorne. But it's my turn to buy a drink, eh? Waiter, the lady will have an old-fashioned. You like champagne, Mr. Thorne?"

"Champagne cocktail," ordered Thorne.

"Scotch and water," added Thunstone. As the waiter moved away, he said to Thorne, "This will become one of my favorite night spots."

"Illyria is a great drawing card," purred the other, his gray eyes estimating the throng of guests. "Not long now until her midnight act. Ever study the importance of midnight in occult ceremonies, Thunstone? It's exactly midway between sunset and sunrise. Allows the supernatural force to split the dark hours halfway—half for the summoning of courage and strength to come forth, half to do whatever is in hand to do."

"That's the kind of thing John always refuses to explain to me," interjected the Countess.

"You know why," he smiled to her. Then, to Thorne: "Last night you borrowed my lady for a dance. May I borrow yours?"

The singer had finished, the orchestra played. Thunstone and the Countess glided away together. Her bright hair came up to his chin. She gave him a quick, appraising flash of blue eyes.

"I really came here to meet you," she said. "You wouldn't invite me, so—"

"So you asked Rowley Thorne to oblige?"

"Hardly. He telephoned me. Enterprising gentleman, to find my address and so on. We had dinner, a theater, and lots

of fascinating talk. About your forbidden subject. Why don't you approve of him, John?"

"Haven't I said that I wouldn't talk about him?"

"And I suppose you won't, even to show me that I shouldn't go out with him any more. You're pretty stern in your policy. Or is it too strong a word, policy? Shouldn't I say prejudice or obsession?"

"I'm afraid," he said slowly, "that I'm a very old-fashioned dancer."

"Which means that you dance only to please me. I'm really flattered, John."

Their dancing continued in silence. When they returned to the table, their drinks waited. Rowley Thorne was charming, exhibiting a strange ring with a cabinet setting, which he said had once held poison for a Borgia; and he had begun a good-humored discussion of thought transference, when the lights and sounds ceased as abruptly as before. The gong tolled, the master of ceremonies spoke: "Midnight. The witching hour. And Illyria!"

She was there, in the brown spotlight, throwing off her robe to dance and chant. "*Legba choi-yan, choi-yan Zandor—*"

Thunstone felt a sudden light touch on his hand. Sharon, the Countess Montesecco, wanted to hold hands in the dark. For reasons of his own, he drew his fingers away, straining his eyes to pierce the gloom. Because something was there with Illyria, who should be alone in the center of the dance floor—it wasn't time yet for the man with the speckled rooster—

*"Legba choi-yan, choi-yan Zandor—
Zandor Legba, immole'—bai!"*

THAT old trick, taught him long ago by a Pennsylvania Dutch coon hunter—Thunstone closed his eyes tightly for a moment, then opened them wide. The darkness paled ever so slightly, to a sort of bluish dusk, and he saw it, saw the stir

of motion above Illyria's tossing head. Branches of a tree, with long trailing leaves or moss—branches, or their shadow, here in the Club Samedi, far from any natural growth of any kind—and along the branch lay and quivered something, a definite hulk of substance that moved and lived within arm's reach of the dancer. . . .

"—immole'—bai!"

The speckled rooster was in her hands. She caught it by the neck, forced its head back and around. *Crrrrrack!*

Overhead something seemed to sag down for a moment, like a strand of fabric, or a tentacle, or an arm. Next moment Illyria was gone, the attendant with the dead rooster was gone, the lights were blinding, and—no branch showed waving from the ceiling.

"Tomorrow midnight will see Illyria repeat the voodoo-dance," the announcer was shouting, "and the midnight after that . . ."

Thunstone got up. "Good-night," he said, and bowed toward Sharon. "This is all I came to see."

"Must you go so soon?" she pleaded, and he nodded that he must. "Good-night, Thorne. I'll see you again. Later."

He put money in the waiter's hand and strolled away to the cloak-room. Retrieving his hat, he turned to go. Rowley Thorne was there beside him.

"You said you'd see me later," said Thorne. "Why not see me now, Thunstone? You know, I know all about you. You're an exhaustive researcher into certain things, to destroy them. I'm surprised that you don't know me."

"I do know all about you, Thorne, or as much as I want to know. I just didn't let on. You were kicked out of two European universities for pursuits the faculties abhorred. The police of France, England and India have all issued you standing dares to set foot on their territory. You'd be a known international crook if it wasn't for the fact that you steal or swindle only

enough to support you in luxury for your activity in the very thing I've been fighting."

Rowley Thorne bowed. "You being what you are, I wouldn't want any other estimate of myself from you. We've been on opposite sides for years, and now we're face to face. One of us will be hurt."

"I'm sure of that," said Thunstone. "Good-night, Thorne."

Thorne did not move from his way. The gray eyes were pale as moonlight. "I don't think, Thunstone, that you can afford to play tricks with me. For I haven't any vulnerable point. And you have, sitting at my table yonder."

Thunstone returned his stare. Where Thorne's gray eyes narrowed, Thunstone's widened a trifle.

"The Countess is charming," Thorne almost crooned. "You've thought so for years, haven't you? And yet you let her get away from you. Another man got her. Perhaps that will happen again."

"The future will tell," Thunstone replied. "I recognize her appeal to you, Thorne. Money, isn't it? She's rich."

"I'll need money for what I intend to do, for which the ground work is two-thirds complete." Thorne stepped aside and bowed. "I mustn't detain you longer, Thunstone. Good-night. Sleep well. Maybe I'll send you a dream."

Thunstone left the Club Samedi, but he did not sleep. He visited three people, all of them among his friends and all of them owing him favors.

FIRST of these was a high official of the New York police. The man argued vehemently but futilely against what Thunstone demanded, and finally agreed. "I don't know what the charge can be," he mourned lamely.

"Find one, and thanks."

Thunstone's next stop was in Harlem. He entered the modest but comfortable

home of a smiling brown man who wore the round collar and high waistcoat of a preacher, and who shook Thunstone's hand warmly. They talked for a while, and the brown man's smile vanished. He took books from a shelf. The first of these was gaily striped in red and blue.

"'Tell My Horse,' by Zora Neale Hurston," said the brown man. "She's a Barnard graduate, a Guggenheim fellow, an anthropologist, and an open-minded truth seeker. She traveled a year in the West Indies, and wrote this book. Lippincott published it in 1938." His sepia-tinted finger found a place for Thunstone. "Read right there."

Thunstone noted the page number, 171. He began to read aloud: "... for Legba is never honored alone. He opens the gate so that the other gods come to their worshipers."

"Exactly," nodded the brown man, and leafed backward in the book. "Now. Read again."

THUNSTONE did so: "The way to all things is his hands. Therefore he is the first god in all Haiti in point of service."

The book fell shut, and the two men looked at each other above it.

"I'm thinking of an old legend, almost an outworn one," said Thunstone. "It's about a sorcerer's apprentice, who raised devils without thinking of the consequences. What's that next book?"

"It's by Montague Summers, the greatest authority on witchcraft." Brown hands opened it. "Here's the reference. He says that those who attend the ceremonies of evil without protesting or trying to stop them become, by acquiescence, participants in the cult. That would hardly include you—you attend to learn how to fight such things. The others, whether deliberately sympathetic or just unknowing, become cult-members."

"I hope not all," said Thunstone, think-

ing of fair hair and sapphire eyes. "And the third book there?"

"It's by Joseph J. Williams. Like Summers, he's a priest, a Jesuit. As a resident of Jamaica, he studied and wrote of voodoo and obeah. He mentions the missionary-effort of the cult to spread, and how the worshipers hope to transplant their evil spirits to other lands."

Thunstone frowned in thought. After a moment he said: "Legba, then, is to be invoked in conjunction with a prayer to some other spirit. But here he's invoked alone. Twice."

"A third time in succession—that's pretty familiar magical routine. He may give attention, and do something else beside open gates."

"Exactly." The dark man's head nodded slowly. "And, in a new place, a new power to profit—evil profit—will be placed in the hands of certain cult-founders. Your acquaintance, Rowley Thorne, won't have overlooked the chance. It is best that the ritual be somehow prevented this coming midnight."

"I think I've attended to that," said Thunstone. "And I half guessed these other matters. But I'm grateful for your agreement. I take your word on voodoo-fighting as better than any other man's. Well, I shan't keep you up any later."

"Heaven protect you," said the brown man in farewell.

Thunstone grinned. "Heaven's supposed to protect all fools."

"Yes, and all fighters for the right. Good-by."

His third call was to a small shop in a big building in mid-town. It was open, and a single person, a little grizzled old fellow, in charge. He greeted Thunstone warmly.

"I want," said Thunstone, "protection."

"For yourself?"

"Not for myself. A woman."

"Come into the back room." Thunstone followed the proprietor into a musty work-

shop. From a table the little man took a black velvet case and opened it.

"Silver," he pronounced. "Sovereign defense against evil."

"And set with sapphires," added Thunstone. "So much the better for my purpose."

"Observe, Mr. Thunstone, the pattern of the brooch. An interweaving of crosses. That flower, too—"

"A blossom of St. John's wort," said Thunstone. He peered at the brooch. "How old is it?"

The grizzled head shook. "Who can say? Yet the man I got it from says that it's a good thousand years old, and that it was designed and made by St. Dunstan." Shrewd old eyes twinkled at Thunstone. "Dunstan sounds like Thunstone, eh? He was like you, he was. A gentleman born and bred, who studied black magic—and caught Satan's nose in a pair of red-hot pincers!"

"How much?" asked Thunstone.

"To you, nothing. Not a cent. No, sir, don't argue. I owe you my life and more. Where shall I send it?"

"I'll give you the address, and a message."

Thunstone took out one of his cards, and wrote on the back:

Sharon—

I know you love sapphires. Won't you wear this for me, and take lunch with me today?

John.

"It'll reach her early in the morning," promised the jeweler. Thunstone thanked him and departed.

The dark hours, ascribed by Rowley Thorne to supernatural agencies, had gone, and the sun was three-quarters up when Thunstone sought his bed.

SHARON, Countess Montesecco, was charming in tailored blue as she met Thunstone in the lobby of the restaurant.

Her one piece of jewelry was the sapphire-and silver brooch.

"Why so glum, John?" she asked as they sought their table. "Cross? Because I gave a date to Rowley?"

"First names with you, too," he murmured. "No, Sharon, not cross. I haven't a right to be, have I?"

"Rowley said that you and he quarreled about me last night."

"We discussed you," admitted Thunstone. "But if we had quarreled, seriously, one or the other of us would not be on view today."

They paused as a waiter drifted up to take their order. Over the cocktail, Sharon said, "You won't object, then, if Rowley takes me to the Club Samedi again tonight."

Thunstone scowled a little. "Club Samedi? But it's been closed. Some little technicality about the precautions against fire. I saw a couple of lines in the morning paper."

"I know about that, but it'll open in a few days. Meanwhile, there'll be a late rehearsal of the entertainers tonight. No guests, but—"

"If no guests, how are you and Thorne going to be present?"

She smiled a little. "You are interested, after all, even interested enough to interrupt me. It happens that Rowley has bought an interest in the Club Samedi. He'll be present, and he said he'd call for me at 11 o'clock." She paused, and looked at him shyly. "If you would care to see me earlier in the evening . . ."

He shook his head. "I'd care to, but I can't. I have something that, as Jules de Grandin would put it, demands to be done. Sharon, do you know where Rowley Thorne lives?"

"Not exactly. I think somewhere near Gramercy Park—yes, on East Nineteenth Street. Why, John?"

He did not answer that, but gazed at

the brooch she wore. He put forth a finger and touched it lightly. "Now, I'll ask a favor. I don't do that often, do I? Sharon, wear this tonight."

"Oh, I meant to. I love it, John. It's a beautiful old thing."

The food arrived, and Thunstone had not told her why he wanted Thorne's address. But, after they parted, he again called on the police official who had, at his request, closed the Club Samedi. He asked several questions, and waited while his friend made telephone calls and checked many papers. Finally the policeman gave him an address on Nineteenth Street. "Don't know what floor, John," said the policeman. "We'll know tomorrow, if—"

"Tomorrow may be too late," Thunstone told him. "Now, one last favor. If I'm arrested tonight for house-breaking, will you do what you can to get me a light sentence?"

THE particular block on East Nineteenth Street was a shabby, quiet one. It was past ten o'clock when Rowley Thorne emerged from a building with a yellow-brick front. He was dressed magnificently in evening clothes, with a cape falling from his thick shoulders in dignified folds. He got into a waiting taxi, which rolled to the corner, then uptown. After it had gone, John Thunstone emerged from behind a basement stairway railing opposite and entered the door of the building.

On the right wall of the vestibule were five mail slots, each topped with a name and a bell button. Thunstone studied the names.

None of them remotely resembled Rowley Thorne's name. On Thunstone's brow appeared the creasy frown that showed his descent into deep thought. Then he approached his forefinger to the button at the rear of the row, beside a lettered label reading *BOGAN, S.* At the last moment he did not touch that button, but

the one above the next slot, which was marked *LEONARD, 4*.

A moment of silence, then the lock of the door emitted a muffled buzzing. Thunstone turned the knob and entered. A narrow hallway revealed itself, with a staircase mounting upward. Thunstone started to climb, swiftly and softly for all his size.

He came to the top of two flights of stairs without adventure. At the top of the third waited a stocky man in a sleeveless undershirt. "Yeah?" he prompted.

"Mr. Bogan?" asked Thunstone.

"Nah, my name's Leonard." The man jerked a thumb upward. "Bogan's on the top floor."

"I see. Thanks." Thunstone's eye caught a gleam at the center of Leonard's throat—a cheap gold-plated crucifix. "Sorry to have troubled you, Mr. Leonard."

"That's all right." The man shuffled back into his apartment. Thunstone mentally crossed him off of a possible investigation list; no partner of Rowley Thorne would wear a crucifix.

He went up the last flight of stairs. Halfway to the top he heard voices, a man's and a woman's, in furious argument.

"I'm fed up," the man was saying vehemently. "I'm tired of all this constant pretending. We're through."

"That suits me fine, and double," rejoined the woman. "Okay, get out."

"Get out?" the man echoed scornfully. "Me get out? Listen, I pay the rent of this place. You're the one that's getting out."

"I'm doing nothing of the sort! It's my furniture, isn't it? Didn't my own mother give it to us? Well, I'm not walking away and leaving you in possession of my furniture—"

Thunstone permitted himself to smile. Plainly there would be no room for Rowley Thorne's career of strange study and experiment in such an atmosphere as that. . . .

He descended to the third floor. He

knocked at the door. There was no answer. After listening a moment, he produced a great bundle of keys. The third of them unlocked the door, and he entered. Enough light came through the windows for him to see the interior, comfortable though dingy. There were five rooms, and in one of these was a bed, on which lay the drunkest man Thunstone had met in many months. Thunstone's search was for writings and books. There were no writings, and only two books. Thunstone carried them to the window. One was a cheap, worn copy of "Gone with the Wind," the other a New Testament. Thunstone left the apartment without hesitation.

The apartment on the second floor was occupied by three working girls. Thunstone introduced himself as a field man for a national poll, and asked questions that brought forth the readiest of answers. Within half a dozen exchanges he absolved this apartment too of any Rowley Thorne influence, but it was with difficulty he made his exit; the girls were expecting company, and wanted to exhibit their poll-making visitor.

Finally he tapped at the door on the first floor. A pudgy middle-aged woman answered the knock. "Is this the superintendent's apartment?" asked Thunstone.

She shook her head. "No. He's in the basement. That is, he was. I think he went out just now, all dressed up for lodge or something."

"I'll talk to his wife," said Thunstone.

"Ain't got a wife. Just him."

"What kind of superintendent is he?"

"All right. Kind of close-mouthed and cross. But I'd rather have them that way than too talky. Why?"

"I'm thinking of moving in here," Thunstone told her.

"You can't. House is full up."

Thunstone thanked her, and turned as if to leave. When her door closed, he tiptoed down the basement stairs.

BUT the door was fitted with a patent lock. His keys would not open it. Thunstone drew out a pocket knife and whittled knowingly at a panel. He made a hole big enough to admit one hand, and unfastened the door from within. Then he moved stealthily inside, past a furnace and coal bin, to an inner door.

This, too, had a strong and complicated lock, but its hinges were on the outside. Thunstone managed to grub out the pins and lifted the door bodily out. He walked into the silent room beyond.

It was dimly lighted, by a little lamp on a shelf. Thunstone walked to it. There sat a small stone image of extreme ugliness. Thunstone sniffed at the lamp. "Ghee," he muttered under his breath. "Indian god—Indian worship." On the same shelf were several books, two of them in languages that Thunstone could not read. The others were on occult subjects, and all except one had been proscribed, banned and outlawed by various governments.

Thunstone moved into the other room of the caretaker's apartment. Another shelf held more idols, of various makes. Before one burned a long stick of incense. A second was of wood. The caretaker apparently observed several worships, each with its proper and esoteric ritual. On the table were several papers.

The first was a carbon copy of an agreement, whereby Rowley Thorne agreed to pay within thirty days the sum of ten thousand dollars for a half interest in the fixtures and profits of the Club Samedi. The second was a penciled scrawl, by someone of limited education but undeniable shrewdness, reporting on the financial affairs of Sharon, Countess Montesecco. The third was in ink, on scented stationery, the writing of an educated woman:

Thursday.

Like you, I feel that too many worshippers spoil a worship. If you find what

you seek, then you will be master of a faith never before followed, and I shall be content, as always, to be your servant. When you have miracles to show, others will bring service and wealth. If this is what you have always wanted, I will be glad, so glad. Even if it must be gained by your gallantry to that blonde fool, I will be glad.

Thunstone did not know the name signed to this letter, but it completed his search for knowledge. He glanced at his wrist watch—the illuminated dial showed that it was 11:30. Quickly he unfastened the front door of the apartment, hurried up the outer steps, and on to the corner, where he waved wildly for a taxi.

"Club Samedi," he bade the driver.

"The Samedi's closed down," the driver began to say.

"Club Samedi," repeated Thunstone, "and drive like the devil."

HE REACHED the rear of the club by entering a restaurant, bribing a waiter, and walking out through the kitchen. Across a courtyard was the dingy back door. He tried the door stealthily. It was locked, and he did not attempt to pick the lock. Instead he turned to where several garbage cans were lined against the wall. One of these he set on the other, climbed gingerly upon them, and with a sudden leap was able to clutch the guttered edge of the roof.

For a moment he clung, then, swaying powerfully sidewise and at the same time flexing the muscles of his big arms, he drew himself up, hooked a heel into the gutter. He dragged his body up on the flat roof and stole across it to a skylight.

Cautiously he peered in and down. The room below was dark, but he caught a gleam from pots and pans on a rack—this would be the kitchen. He pushed himself through feet first, lowered himself to

the full length of his arms, and dropped.

Noise he must have made, but nobody challenged him. He dared to strike a match. On an oven-top he saw a cardboard box, marked SALT. He eagerly clutched it.

"Lafcadio Hearn commented on it," he said under his breath. "So did W. B. Seabrook. I'm set."

He tiptoed toward the service door to the club auditorium. As he reached it, he heard the voice of the master of ceremonies:

"Midnight. The witching hour. And Illyria!"

THE voodoo music began, clarinet and tom-tom, and masked the slight noise of Thunstone's entrance.

From the kitchen threshold he could see Illyria's dance begin in the brown glow of the spotlight. To one side stood Rowley Thorne, extra big in the gloom, his hands quelling the struggles of the sacrificial rooster. Plainly he would substitute for the regular assistant. The only spectator was Sharon, sitting beyond the spotlight at a ringside table.

This much Thunstone saw at his first glance. His second marked the other presence in the darkened club.

There was a swaying above Illyria, a swaying in time to music. A great fronded shadow drooped lower and lower, as if a heavy weight forced it down. The jungle foliage that Thunstone had seen before had returned to being inside the ceiling, and the shaggy bulk was upon it, edging stealthily close to Illyria.

*"Legba choi-yan, choi-yan Zandor—
Zandor Legba, immole'—bai!"*

And, "*Ibro mahnda!*" chanted the drummer and Thorne, doing duty for the absent quartet.

"Ibro mahnda. . . Ibro mahnda!"

The climax of the dance was approaching. Faster and faster went the music, then

died suddenly as Illyria struck her pose, head back and arms out. Rowley Thorne stole forward, holding the rooster at arm's length. And yet another pair of arms were reaching, enormous arms from above, like the distorted shadows of arms on a lighted screen, but arms which ended in clumsy claws and not hands, arms tufted and matted in hair. . . .

Thunstone darted forward. Under one arm he held the salt-box. His other hand caught Thorne's wrist, wrung it like a dish-cloth. Thorne gasped in startled pain, and the rooster sprang free, running crookedly across the floor.

A great streak of gloomy shadow pursued it, something like claws made a grab at it, and missed. Thorne suddenly began to rave:

"Legba, Legba! I wasn't at fault—a stranger—down on your knees, all of you! Death is in this room! Death to your bodies, and your souls, too!"

His voice had the power to command. All of them floundered to their knees, all save Thunstone and the shaggy bulk that was sliding down through the shadows of foliage. . . .

Thunstone tore open the salt package. One hand clutched as much salt as it could hold. The other threw the box, and it struck something that, however ill-defined in the brown light, certainly had solidity. The missile burst like a shell, scattering its contents everywhere.

Thunstone will remember to his death the prolonged wave of high sharp sound that might have been scream or roar, and might even have had words mixed into it—words of whatever unidentified tongue formed the voodoo rituals. A grip fastened upon him, a great embracing pressure that might have been talon-like hands or coils like a huge serpent. He felt his ribs buckle and creak, but he let himself be lifted, gathered close. And he put out his handful of salt, swiftly but coolly and

orderly, and thrust it well at the point where a face should be.

The surface on which he spread the salt opposed his hand for but a moment. Then it was gone, and so was the grip on his body. He fell hard and sprawling, but was up again in an instant. Overhead there were no branches. There was nothing. But just at Thunstone's feet lay Illyria. The light was enough to show him that, at some point in the proceedings, her neck had been broken, like the neck of a speckled fowl sacrificed to Legba.

He went to a wall, found a switch, and flicked it. The room filled with light. "Get up, everybody," he ordered, and they did so. Only Illyria lay where she had fallen.

HE WALKED back among them. "Salt did it. Salt will always drive away the most evil of spirits. It was something that Mr. Thorne had not planned for, that I'd attend his rehearsal, too."

"You've caused the death of Illyria," accused Thorne. His face looked pallid and old, and his gray eyes roved sickly in it.

"No. You doomed her when you first took an interest in this matter of invoking Legba. It's possible that her unthinking invocation would have resulted in unpleasantness, but no more. Your knowledge and deliberate espousal of the activity made the coming of Legba dangerous.

"He'd have come at the third time, if I weren't here to prevent him. He would have come with other powers than the mere opening of gates, for you prayed to no other voodoo diety. A cult could have been founded here, and not even heaven knows how it may have developed."

Thunstone looked around at the shivering listeners. "You others are lucky. Thorne intended to bind you all to Legba, by the sheer fact of your witnessing the cult's beginning. He's the sort who could do it. You'd have been made to help him

establish Legba-worship with this club as a headquarters, and with money he intended to get from—"

He felt the wide gaze of Sharon, and said no more, but walked to her.

At her side, he turned on Thorne once again.

"Whatever money you get, you must get elsewhere now. I don't think that Sharon will listen to you further. I'll be amused to know how you are going to meet a debt of ten thousand dollars, when you have been living on sheer wit, bluff and evil. But whatever you do, Thorne, do as honestly as possible. I intend to keep watch upon you."

Sharon caught Thunstone's arm with one hand. The other clung to the brooch on her bosom. "I don't exactly understand . . ." she breathed.

"Of course not. You weren't supposed to. It will take time to make itself clear. But meanwhile we'll go. Thorne will have his hands full and his mind full, inventing a plausible explanation for the death of the club's star dancer."

Nobody moved as Thunstone conducted Sharon to the street.

"John," she said, "I only half-saw that something was coming into view. What? And from where?"

"It came through the gate beyond which such things have life and power. And you may call it Legba, if you want to remember it by name."

"I don't," and she put her hands to her face.

"Then I seem to have made a point. Evil magic isn't to be poked into, is it? Not unless you're able to take both precautions and risks. Shall I see you home, Sharon?"

"Please. And stay there and talk to me until the sun rises again."

"Until the sun rises again," repeated John Thunstone.

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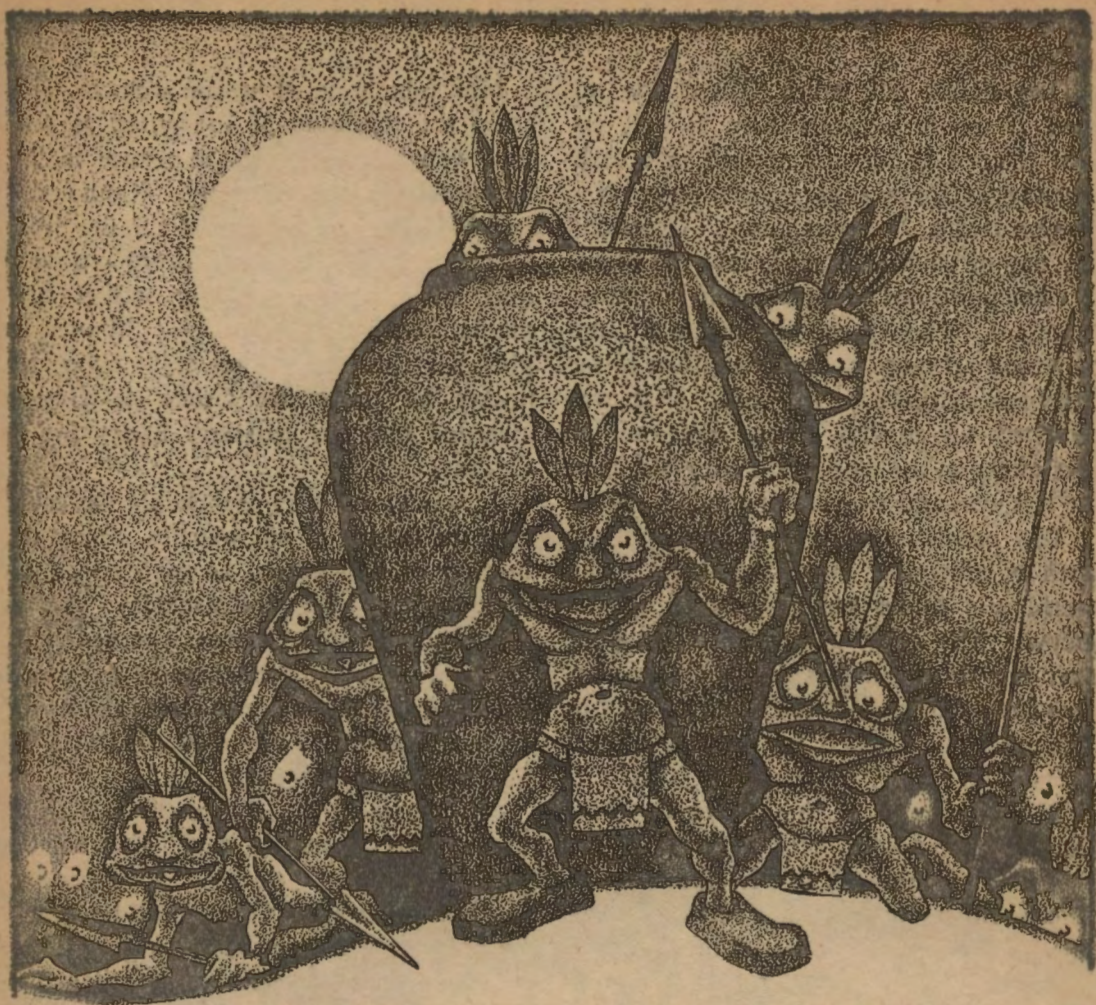
**"The Golden
Goblins"**

by MANLY
WADE
WELLMAN

The
Werewolf
Scourge

"Bon
Voyage,
Michele"

SEABURY QUINN



Each warrior was given a sacred bundle, to keep and
to pass on in reverence down through generations

The Golden Goblins

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

LONG SPEAR'S tailoring was, if anything, superior to John Thunstone's, and his necktie more carefully knotted. His blue-black hair, if a trifle longer than currently fashionable, lay smooth and glossy to his skull, swept back

from a broad brow the color of a well-kept old saddle. His eyes gleamed like wet licorice, and when he slightly smiled his teeth made a pure white slash in his rectangular face. Long Spear had been an honor man at some Southern university,

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

member of a good fraternity and captain of a successful basketball team. But, as he sat in Thunstone's drawing room, he cuddled most prayerfully an object that looked to have come straight out of the Stone Age.

Thunstone, big and reposeful and hospitable, lolled in an easy chair opposite. He puffed at the pipeful of fragrant tobacco Long Spear had given him—tobacco mixed, Indian fashion, with kinickinick and red willow bark—and eyed the thing that Long Spear had brought into the room. It was shaped like a smallish, compact bolster, snugly wrapped in some kind of ancient rawhide, on which dark hair still remained. Tight-shrunk leather thongs held that wrapping in place. In Long Spear's hands it seemed to have some solidity and weight.

"I want you to keep it for me, my friend," said Long Spear. "Your trail to Those Above is different from the Indian's; but you know and respect the faith of my people."

"I respect all true worships," nodded Thunstone. "Yet I know very little of what your tribe believes. If you care to tell me, I would care to hear."

"We Tsichah were living on the Western Plains when the first Spaniards came under Coronado," Long Spear told him, and his voice shifted to a proud, deep register. "Before that, we had lived—who knows where? The name of the land cannot be traced today, and perhaps it is legendary. But the old men say that we came from there to the plains country. When the Tsichah made ready to migrate, their guardians—Those Above—descended from the Shining Lodge and walked like men to advise and help them. To each warrior who headed a family was given a sacred bundle, to keep in his home and to pass on in reverence to his oldest son. This," and he lifted the rawhide bolster, "is one such, given to the man who fathered my clan of the Tsichah. I, as

hereditary chief, have charge of it. When I came East, for the purpose of conferring with the government, I felt I must bring it along."

"For worship, or for safe keeping?" asked Thunstone.

"For both." Long Spear spoke almost defiantly. "I have learned white men's ways, learned them so well that I think I shall defeat the warped arguments that now threaten us. But I hold to my father's belief, as a true son should. Do you object?"

"Not in the least, because you don't object to mine." Thunstone leaned forward. "Will you permit me to touch the bundle?"

Long Spear passed it to him, as gently as though it were an infant prince asleep. As Thunstone had judged, it was compact and quite weighty. He examined the rawhide with a soft pressure of his long, strong forefinger. His eyes were studious on either side of his big dented nose.

"Buffalo hide, I judge. But is it as old as you seem to think?"

LONG SPEAR smiled, quite beautifully. "Not the hide. That was put on by my grandfather when he was no older than I, say sixty years ago. When the outer covering of the bundle becomes worn or damaged, we wrap it in fresh hide. It is not permitted to open the bundle. That is, as the Tsichah say, bad medicine."

"Of such bundles I've heard," nodded Thunstone. "Yet I've never seen one, even in the museums."

"You won't find the Ark of the Covenant in a museum, either," reminded Long Spear. "A Tsichah would as soon sell the bones of his father. And don't ask me what's at the center of the bundle. I do not know, and I do not think any other living man knows. I do not think that anyone had better find out."

Thunstone handed the bundle back. "Well, you want me to keep it for you.

But why? What makes you hesitate to keep it yourself?"

"Someone's after it," said Long Spear, in a voice that suddenly grew taut and deadly. "Someone who calls himself a reformer, who protests against the old Tsichah worship. He knows it makes our tribe solid on its reservation. And he wants to disrupt, so as to rob the Tsichah as other tribes have been robbed."

Thunstone lighted his pipe again. "Let me guess, Long Spear. Might the name be Rowley Thorne?"

The blue-black head shook. "No. I've heard a little of him, he causes trouble and evil for trouble and evil's sakes. You've met him and defeated him, haven't you? . . . Rowley Thorne is washing dishes in a restaurant where I would not care to eat. This is someone else."

"I've heard of Roy Bulger."

Again a head-shake. "No. The Reverend Mr. Bulger opposes our worship, calling it heathen—but he's an honest, narrow missionary. He isn't in it for profit."

"You Indians like to put riddles, don't you? The man must be Barton Siddons."

"Yes." Long Spear's brown fist clenched on top of his bundle. "He's interested several Congressmen who know nothing about Indians. Convinces them that we're banded together in ancient warrior belief, and may cause trouble, even an uprising. Wants restrictions placed on our worship. Well," and the other fist clenched, "I'm here in the East to argue with certain Congressmen myself. If they don't listen, I'll talk to the President. And I can finish up with the Supreme Court. There's such a thing as freedom of worship."

"And I'm to protect your sacred bundle from Siddons?"

"If you will. He told me that he'd destroy it, as a symbol of wickedness. Nice apeing of the fanatic reformer style—but what he really wants to do is shame me before my people. I wouldn't dare go back

to them without the bundle, even if I gained a victory in the dispute. You understand?"

"Perfectly," said Thunstone.

He rose, towering mightily, and crossed the room to where hung a painting of autumn trees. He pushed it aside and revealed a wall safe, which he opened. "Will it go in here?"

Long Spear brought it, and it went in easily. Thunstone closed his safe and spun the dial.

"Now, my friend, they say that no Indian will refuse a drink. How about one here, and some lunch in the grill downstairs?"

Those who understand John Thunstone, and they are not many, say that he has two passions—defeat of ill-magic, and service of the lovely Sharon, Countess Montesecco. This does not mean that he is otherwise cold or distant. His friends include all sorts of persons, not all of them canny, but all of them profitable. He likes to set himself apart from others who study occultism in that he does not believe himself to be psychic. If he were asked the wish of his heart, he might say that it was the return of honesty and good manners.

HE AND Long Spear had a good lunch, for they both liked excellent food and plenty of it. At the end of it, Long Spear excused himself, promising to come later in the evening. Thunstone remained alone at the table, sipping a green liqueur and thinking about whatever Thunstone is apt to think about. His reverie was broken by a voice beside him.

"Pardon me, but aren't you John Thunstone? The author of those articles in the *Literary Review* about modern witch beliefs. I read them—enjoyed them a lot. Mind if I sit down? Siddons is my name."

The speaker was narrow-bodied, tall, with hair growing to a point on his forehead and a cleft dimple in his chin. He

might be distinguished-looking except for too shifty, greedy eyes. He dropped into the chair that Long Spear had vacated.

"Mr. Thunstone, to judge by your writings and your looks, you're a civilized gentleman with a sense of spiritual rights and wrongs."

"Thanks," nodded Thunstone.

"Do you know that Indian you were eating with?"

"I seldom eat with people I don't know, Mr. Siddons."

"I mean, do you know his character? Mr. Thunstone, I'll be blunt. He's a dangerous barbarian."

THUNSTONE sipped. "Barbarian is a hard word for Long Spear. He's well educated, and has profited by it. Do I understand that you and he are enemies?"

Siddons nodded emphatically. "We are, I'm proud to say. I know these aboriginal intellectuals, Mr. Thunstone. Yapping for special rights and prerogatives, on the grounds of being here first. And planning, sir, to bite the hand that feeds them—bite it clear off, if they get teeth enough!"

And Siddons showed his own teeth.

Thunstone made his voice lazy as he said, "I never saw Long Spear bite anything savagely, except perhaps a filet mignon. Suppose, Mr. Siddons, you tell me what fault you find with him, and why you seek to impress me with it."

"Fault? Plenty of that. The man's a heathen. His tribe—the Tsichah—believes in human sacrifice." Again Siddons grimaced furiously. "A captive girl, consecrated to whatever devil they worship, shot to death with arrows and chopped to bits—"

"The Tsichah haven't done that for a century or so," reminded Thunstone smoothly. "It's an interesting study, that sacrifice rite. Done for crop fertility, and suggests some relationship to the Aztecs. The Tsichah were considerably cultured for plains Indians lived in earth houses in-

stead of teepees, grew maize and beans and potatoes, were well advanced in painting and carving, and had a hereditary aristocracy."

"That's what I'm getting at," rejoined Siddons warmly. "Hereditary aristocracy. Because a copper-colored tramp is born of the old chieftain stock, he swanks around like a grand duke. Not American."

"Not American?" repeated Thunstone. "The Tsichah were here well before us. And it's American to let them keep to their own ways."

"Not the ways of the Tsichah. Not when they're dangerous. Sir, I've been there to their reservation. They stick together like a secret society, with their scowling brown faces and maybe knives and pistols under their shirts. It's their clinging to old customs and worships, and obedience to their hereditary chiefs, that makes them a menace. I'm one who wants to stop them."

Thunstone considered. "It seems," he said slowly, "that twice before white men tampered with the Indian religions. There were uprisings each time, brutal and bloody—the Smohalla Rebellion in the 'eighties, and the Ghost Dance War in 1891. If the Tsichah worship is tampered with . . . but why should it be?"

"A religion that advocates human sacrifice?"

"I know that it hasn't been practiced for years. The Tsichah worship the Shining Lodge and Those Above, quietly and sincerely. And they credit their gods with being kind—giving them, for instance, mineral wealth, mines of cinnabar and some oil property."

SIDDONS started violently, and licked his lips. "Well, it's still heathen and barbaric, and as a non-white organization it's dangerous. Now to answer the second part of your question. Why should I tell you these things, you ask. It ties up to your friend, Long Spear."

"A civilized American citizen," said Thunstone.

"Suppose," said Siddons craftily, "I was to prove that he wasn't?"

Thunstone's black brows lifted, and he said nothing.

"Suppose I should tell you," went on Siddons, "that he carries a savage talisman with him, and places his faith and sense of power in it? An ancient fetish—"

"A sacred bundle of the Tsichah religion?" suggested Thunstone.

"Exactly. You know about sacred bundles?"

"A little. Go on with what you say."

"Well, Long Spear has one. His whole narrow Indian mind is obsessed with how holy and mighty that thing is. I mentioned the possibility of destroying it, and he said quite frankly that he'd kill me for that."

Again Thunstone said nothing. His eyebrows came down again, his eyes narrowed a trifle.

"You, Mr. Thunstone, have a reputation for crushing evil beliefs. And I have in mind that you might be persuaded to help—"

"I know that Long Spear has the bundle. I've seen it."

Siddons leaned forward excitedly. "Do you know where it is?"

"I do," said Thunstone, still smoothly. "It's in a safe place of my lending, and it will stay there. Mr. Siddons, you'd better leave it alone, or I feel sure that Long Spear's prophecy of death will come true."

Thunstone got up. He was always immense when he did that.

"I'd heard about your real purpose in wanting to disorganize the Tsichah. I made sure by mentioning their mineral wealth, and saw you start. You want to get your hands on it, don't you, Siddons? Well, I'm not going to help you. I'll help Long Spear, because he's a sound, honorable pagan gentleman, and a credit to any race. Good day."

Siddons rose in turn. His face twisted, his eyes rolled a little.

"I might have known. You hokus-pokus birds are all alike, crackpots. But don't try to buck me, Thunstone. I might cut you down to a dwarf."

He strutted out, like a rooster whose dignity has been offended. Thunstone sat back in his chair.

"Waiter," he said, "another liqueur."

LATER in the afternoon Thunstone was alone in his drawing room. On impulse he took the sacred bundle from his safe, and sat in the armchair with it on his lap. Long he studied it, and with true reverent attention.

He tapped the outer envelop of rawhide. Under it was what? Another layer. Under that, another. Another beneath the third—and so on for many layers, each representing a generation or more of time. Finally, if one flouted ritual and peeled them all away, would come into view the original sacred bundle, the gift that Long Spear said had come from Those Above. And inside that—what? Nobody knew. The gods had not told her children, the ancestral Tsichah. And no man had looked.

Thunstone took it in his arms, carefully. He had seen Long Spear do that. His constant yearning for knowledge of the unseen and unknown was strong in him; but evidently not strong enough. He was not psychic, he thought once again. His was not the gift of priesthood or prophecy. He had a sense of solemnity, no more.

Long Spear came in. I had lunch with you," he greeted. "How about dinner with me. . . . I see you're looking at the bundle."

"I didn't think you'd mind, Long Spear."

"I don't. I trust you full with it. What do you think of it?"

Thunstone shook his head. "I was trying to find what to think, by holding it.

It should do something to me, but it doesn't."

"Because you're not a priest, a medicine man. But I am. That's hereditary among the Tsichah, too, the chief is also the prophet. Shall I try for you?"

"Why not?" said Thunstone, holding out the bundle, but Long Spear did not take it at once. Instead he produced from his pocket a pipe, not his usual briar, but a stubby one with a bowl of black stone, old and polished as jet. This he filled most carefully. Facing around so that he looked toward the east, he lighted it. Then, without inhaling, he faced north, and emitted a puff of smoke. Continuing his facing, he puffed on—to west, to south, to east. Finally he observed the "two directions," with final puffs up at the ceiling and down at the floor.

"Give me the bundle now," he said deeply, "and take the pipe. Keep it lighted and smoking. You must sit there, and be the council."

Pipe and bundle changed hands. Thunstone drew a lungful of the fragrant mixed vapors and breathed it out. Through the veil of blue fog he saw Long Spear lay the bundle in the hollow of his left arm, almost like a lyre. His right hand, with fingers slightly bent, rested upon it. The heel of the right hand became a fulcrum and the fingers moved slowly and rhythmically. The old dry hide gave forth a scratching tempo, like that evoked by Latin-American musicians from gourds. Long Spear began to chant, monotonously and softly:

*"Abkidah, ai-ee, ai-ee!
Abkidah, ai-ee!"*

Over and over he chanted the little hymn in his own tongue, and then began slowly to turn. His feet moved and took new positions softly as though he wore moccasins. His brown face turned upward, his eyes sought the ceiling as though they could pierce it to the sky above.

"Abkidah, ai-ee!"

Now it seemed to Thunstone that the smoke began to drift and eddy, though there was no draft in the room. A little wreath swirled momentarily around Long Spear's head, something like a halo. And a hint of other voices, softer than echoes, softer even than the memory of voices long dead, became suggestible, as if they joined in the chant of the Tsichah chief. Raptly Long Spear sang, and prayerfully. More smoke drifted from the pipe in Thunstone's mouth, but the room contained some sort of radiance . . . as if a hand held a lamp to them, not at doors or windows but at some opening from another place, not easily discernible. . . .

Long Spear sat down, and laid the bundle on his knees.

"Put out the pipe," he said. "You've just heard a real prayer-song. We have other stuff, more showmanlike, for tourists and scholars. Not everybody—indeed, hardly anybody—is of the right mind or mood to join with us in our worship. I trust you with that, too."

"I'm flattered, and I did get something, Long Spear. I felt that your prayer, whatever it was, got an answer."

"All my prayers are answered. All of them. I don't mean that all are granted, but I know that they are heard, and that judgment is made on them. Just now I prayed to know what would happen to me, as a man of my people striving for their freedom and good. What I got was a warning of danger—no more."

He was silent, and carefully touched the bundle and its lashings.

"The buffalo hide is old, it may crack soon. I know where a new piece of tanned buckskin may be got, and sinew to sew it on securely. Keep it for me again, will you? I'll bring back the new covering, and make all snug. Then we'll have dinner, eh?"

"Of course."

Long Spear laid the bundle carefully on a center table of rubbed mahogany. Thunstone saw him to the door, and returned to the table for the bundle. He carried it to his safe, put out his hand to open the door.

At that moment something struck him, slashingly on the head behind the ear, struck him with such savage force that not even his big body could stand up under the blow. Down he went on his knees, with darkness rushing over him like water. He could not see, and his ears rang. Somebody was trying to tug the bundle out of his hands.

Thunstone fought to keep it, and another blow drove what was left of his wits clear out of him.

HE WAKENED to find himself in an armchair of wood, where he seldom sat. His ears still hummed, and his first opening of eyes filled his brain with glaring lights. He tried to get up, and felt himself held back by cutting pressure at wrists and ankles and across the chest. Shaking his big head to clear it, he looked down, and saw that lengths of insulated electric wire bound his arms to the arms of the chair, his feet to the front legs. More strands encircled his body, and one loop passed under his chin. His head ached furiously.

"You're all right, Mr. Thunstone?"

He knew that voice. It was Barton Siddons's. The gaunt man bent down anxiously, looking at him.

"Get me out of this," said Thunstone.

"Why should I," asked Siddons airily, "when I took such trouble to drag you to that chair and tie you?"

Thunstone said nothing else, but stared at his captor.

"I've been in this room for more than an hour," went on Siddons. "Hiding behind those hangings. I hoped for a chance to get the bundle—twice as much after

Long Spear gave that heathen exhibition." He glanced toward the center table, where the bundle was lying. "I've been waiting for you to wake up."

"Why?" demanded Thunstone. He wondered how strong his bonds were, but made no exhibition of tugging and struggling.

"Because you shall witness its destruction." Siddons licked his lips. "I intend to discredit Long Spear with his people—and you with Long Spear. He entrusted his treasure to you. You weren't able to keep it safe from him."

Thunstone again kept silent, and stared. His eyes made Siddons uncomfortable.

"From your own lips I heard words of respect for that savage Tsichah belief, Mr. Thunstone. I don't despair of showing you its fallacy. Watch."

Siddons went to the table. Something gleamed in his hand. A knife—he slit one of the binding thongs, another and another. He pulled the ancient buffalo-hide wrapping open. It came away stiffly, with a dry rattle.

"Another layer," observed Siddons, grinning briefly at Thunstone. "Whatever is inside, those Tsichah believed in keeping it well muffled." Another stiff layer of rawhide was pulled away. It adhered, and needed force to detach it. "Now for the third—hello, what's this, tucked in between wrappings?"

He picked it up, a dangling pale tassel.

"Human scalp," he diagnosed. "White man's hair, quite fair. Wrapped in there to signalize a victory, perhaps. But there weren't enough victories. The white man won in the end."

Siddons slit away another hide wrapping. Another. The next broke at his touch, into irregular flakes like old paper.

"Old and rotten," pronounced Siddons. "Now the fifth layer—it must be two hundred years old. And here's something that isn't rawhide."

From the last swaddling he lifted a

strange thing like a rectangular brick, as large as a commercial cement block.

"It was cushioned inside the rawhide by something—perhaps leaves or grass or herbs, all rotted to powder," explained Siddons, as though lecturing amiably to a class. "Look, it's hollow. Got a little slab of baked clay for a lid—comes off easily. Inside, another smaller hollow brick. You may be right, Mr. Thunstone. The Tsichah must have had an ancient history of something close to civilization to do this sort of brickwork. Inside the second, a third—each nested in old leafy dust. And here—we must be at the heart of the thing."

HE HELD up a vase of pottery, so old that the red of the clay was darkened to a mahogany brown. It was no larger than a man's fist, and shaped like an egg with a flattened end to stand on. Siddons poked and twisted.

"Look, the top comes off—unscrews! Who'd have thought that Indians understood the screw principle and would apply it to pottery? I'm leaving these things and you, Mr. Thunstone, for Long Spear to find."

His grin grew wider. "Why don't you take notes, Mr. Thunstone? You're sitting in on a notable event, the opening of an inviolable sacred bundle of a heathen people. And the notes might be important—Long Spear may be so disappointed in you that he'd destroy you before you had a chance to tell verbally what you saw."

"If Long Spear destroys anyone, it will be you," predicted Thunstone.

"Oh, he'll try—and I'll be prepared, and forestall him, and land him in jail. That's where he belongs, and all who head that Tsichah brotherhood. But let's have a final look."

He unscrewed the top of the vase, peeped in with eyes that squinted, then widened.

"Hello! Take a look at that!"

He thrust the open vessel under Thunstone's nose.

Light struck into the dark interior of the vase, and evoked a yellow gleam. Thunstone had a brief impression of eyes, or something like eyes. Then Siddons was fumbling in the vase with his fingers. He took something out and held it up.

"Tin soldier, eh? But it's not tin—it's gold!"

The little figure was no longer than Siddons' thumb. Its yellow body was lizard-gaunt, and set upon brief, bandy legs with great flat feet. It had arms, too, that held a wire-like spear shaft at an angle across the chest. And the head, crowned with golden plumes, was tilted back and the face turned upward. That face was human only as a grotesque Hallowe'en mask is human—with a blob of nose, a gaping mouth from which a tiny tongue lolled, no forehead and no chin. The eyes were tiny blue stones, probably turquoise.

Siddons weighed the thing in his palm, turned it over and over.

"Gold," he repeated. "A little golden goblin. The Indians weren't metallurgist enough to make brass or anything like it. This is probably virgin, and worth plenty as a nugget—worth more as an archaeological find."

He set it upright on the table, pushing back the heap of rifled hide wrappings. It balanced solidly on those wide flat feet. Siddons smiled down upon it.

"Aztec influence, you suggested? Or maybe Maya or Inca, from farther south. I think we'll just keep that little souvenir. As for this pottery container—"

He poised it as if for a smashing downward throw. But then he hesitated, looked inside again. "Well, well! The little gentleman has a brother!"

He drew out another tiny figure. "A duplicate!" he crowed. "Same size, same shape, same attitude! Same spear, same little crumbs of turquoise for eyes." He

set down the vase and picked up the first figurine. "Even the same little scratches and markings, as if the carver duplicated those—what do those Indians think of, Mr. Thunstone?"

Siddons put the two golden goblins side by side on the table. "Cute, eh? How did they both fit in this vase?" He stooped and peered in, then straightened and scowled. He put in a forefinger, drew it out again. "Yes," he said, in a lower voice. "Another of them."

HE BROUGHT it into view and set it by the first pair. It was exactly like them. And Siddons, again at the vase, took out yet another with his left hand, and a fifth with his right hand.

"I don't quite understand," he said, and he was speaking to himself now, not to his prisoner. "There isn't— There doesn't seem to be an end to them."

He set down the fourth and fifth little warriors, took out a sixth. A seventh. An eighth. These, too, he set down. Now his hands trembled. He drew back without fishing in the vase for more.

"Thunstone," he said, "I was wrong about that bundle. It did—it does—have something beyond nature to it."

"It's like that purse in the myth. Fortuna's purse. You took out the gold in it, and more came. And," his voice grew strong again, but with a fierce, semi-hysterical note, "I know where I stand! Thunstone, I'll be rich!"

He almost sprang back to the table. "Don't you see? All these generations, nobody dared open these tabooed bundles! But inside were riches! Riches, that is, for whoever dared come after them!"

He was taking more figures out of the vase, a little golden procession of them. Each he set on the table. Now there were ten—eleven—twelve—fifteen—

"All alike," gurgled Siddons. "All of gold, all of them!"

He had made a row of them, like toy soldiers, clear across the table-top. He turned and faced Thunstone exultantly.

"You can give a message to Long Spear," he said in a sort of whooping quaver. "Tell him that I ruined his bundle, but that I'm not going to fight him or the Tsichah. They can have their land and whatever riches it contains. . . . Thunstone! What are you staring at?"

THUNSTONE'S eyes were not on Siddons, but on the row of figures.

"For a moment," he replied, "it seemed that one or two of those figures moved."

Siddons swivelled around and studied them. "Rot! They only shook or quivered. Maybe I joggled the table."

"You didn't touch it," said Thunstone. "There, Siddons; they moved again. Almost next to your hand."

Siddons turned away from his treasure again, and walked to Thunstone. With the heel of his hand he slapped Thunstone's jaw.

"Don't try to make me nervous," he growled. "It won't work, Thunstone."

"I'll say no more about it," promised Thunstone, watching the table beyond Siddons.

Out of the vase was coming another gold figure, without waiting to be lifted out.

Thunstone saw a tiny fleck of radiance first—a clutching hand on the lip of the vase, a hand no larger than a little frog's forefoot. Then the head came into view, with open mouth and plumes and staring turquoise eyes. Then a leg hooked over, then the whole gleaming yellow body was in view, erect and balancing on the vase's rim. The thing moved nimbly, knowingly, lively as a sparrow. It pointed with its spear—pointed at the back of Siddons.

The others stirred into motion, bunched like a tiny war party.

Siddons was moving back toward the table, and at first glance did not know, or

did not accept, what was happening. Then he shuddered and cried out, but too late.

His hand had rested for a moment on the table. The warrior that had come last from the vase made a sort of grasshopper leap, striking with his tiny gold-wire spear. Thunstone could not make out plainly what happened, but he saw Siddons tugging wretchedly and ineffectually to lift his hand from where it had touched the table. A moment later the other tiny golden bodies had charged, were leaping and scrambling upon Siddons, up his sleeves, up the front of his coat. One thrust a spear at his eye. Another was apparently trying to climb into his ear. Siddons cried out again, but his voice was muffled—Thunstone could not see what was at his mouth.

There was a moving, gleaming cloud and crawling about Siddons' face and head, as if brilliant, venomous insects were swarming there. Siddons dabbed at them once, with his free hand, but very feebly. He began to totter, to buckle at the knees. He sank slowly floorward. The golden warriors receded from him in a wave, as though in disciplined retreat. They were back on the table-top away from him, and the last to leave, their leader, paused to free his little spear from Siddons' hand. Released, Siddons settled prone on the carpet.

The leader of the tiny warriors dropped lightly to the floor. Looking down, Thunstone saw the golden morsel scamper toward him, felt it scale his trouser leg like a monkey on a great tree trunk. The thing came into view upon his chest, fixing him with searching, turquoise eyes, poising a spear calculatingly. The spear-point moved forward—touched a strand of the wire that bound Thunstone. He felt his bonds relax. His feet and hands were free. The golden figurine scrambled down again, retraced its hasty progress to the table, and nimbly hopped up again. It fell into line with the others.

Thunstone sat where he was until Long Spear returned.

"IT IS all easy to interpret," pronounced Long Spear when Thunstone had finished his story. "Siddons desecrated a sacred object, and that object contained the power to punish him. But you were not only spared, but freed of your bonds. There is no reproach to you."

He looked toward the silent form of Siddons. "I find no marks upon him, not even a pin-prick, to show where or how those little spears wounded him. What explanation need be given of his death?"

"No explanation," replied Thunstone, "because none would be believed. It happens that I know certain men who owe me great favors, and who can easily take this body away and dispose of it unknown to the law."

"That is good." Long Spear moved to the table with its discarded bundle-wrappings and the pottery boxes, and the row of little golden warriors. "I have brought back the buckskin sheathing for my bundle. I shall restore it as it was before Siddons meddled."

For a moment he glanced upward, his lips moving soundlessly in prayer to the gods of his tribe. Then he carefully lifted one of the figures, put it in the vase. Another he put inside, another, another, another. One by one he slid them out of sight.

When the last had been put in the vase, Long Spear lifted the lid to screw on top; then he paused, turned to Thunstone, and silently held the vase so that his friend could see inside.

Only a single golden goblin could be seen, a tiny carved image with bandy legs, a spear held slantwise, and upturned grotesque face. Yet—though it may have been a trick of the light—the turquoise eyes caught and held Thunstone's, and one of them seemed to close for a brief instant.

"From the House of the Rat Catcher" H. BEDFORD-JONES

MARCH

Weird Tales

15¢

A
novellette

wherein great,
broad beings walk
beneath the earth . .

by

AUGUST DERLETH

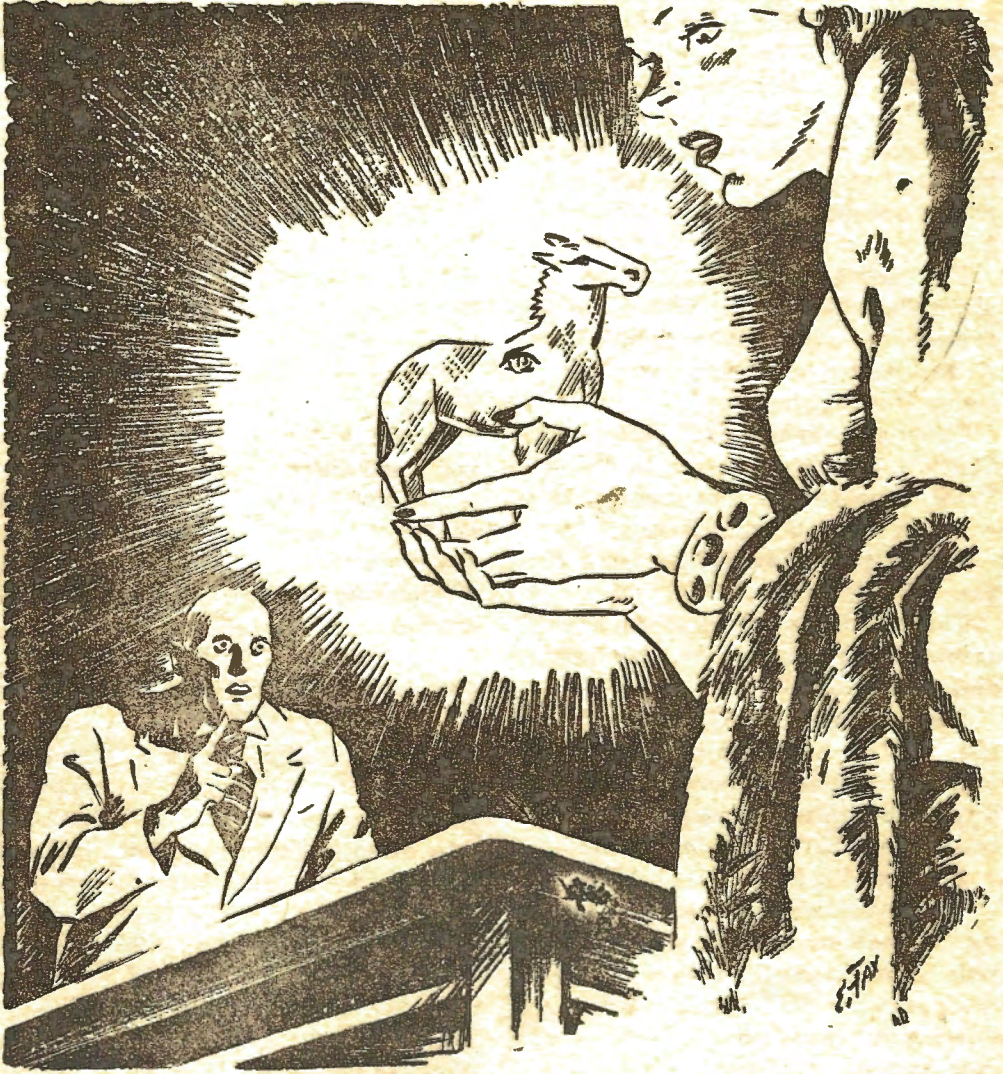
MARLYN WALKER
WELLS

GEORGE QUINN

RAY BRADBURY



When ancient wizards foretold the future they read it in the blood and insides of horses!



Hoofs

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

SOME suggest that the Countess Montesco was born Sharon Hill, of American parents, and got her title by an ill-advised marriage abroad; that the Count, her husband, was a rank bad

man, and that the world and the Countess were better for his death. Nobody knows surely, except John Thunstone, who evinces a great talent of reticence. Yet some suggest . . .

Heading by ELTON FAX

The Countess, at the telephone in her drawing room, directed that the caller waiting in the hotel lobby be sent up. She was compactly, blondely handsome, neither doll nor siren, with a broad brow, an arched nose, and eyes just darker than sapphires. Today she wore blue silk, and no jewelry except a heart-shaped brooch of gold.

The caller appeared, smallish and plumpish, with lips that smiled and eyes as bright and expressionless as little lamps. At her gesture he sat in an armchair, his pudgy fingertips together.

"Your name is Hengist?" prompted the Countess, glancing at a note on her desk. "Yes? You sent me this message, about—certain articles I lost in Europe."

"About your husband," amended Hengist. "He loves you."

The sapphire eyes threw sparks. "That's a clumsy lie or a clumsy joke. My husband died years ago."

"But he loves you," murmured Hengist. "What blue eyes you have! And your hair is like a tawny, mellow wine they make in Slavic countries. Your husband cannot be blamed for loving you."

She shook her head. "He hated me."

"Death works many changes. Look at me. I know much about you, and about your husband. As life is to the living, so death is to the dead. Love can exist and thrive after a body's death. It lives with your husband. . . ."

His voice fell to a cadenced drone. She rose to her feet, and so did Hengist. He was no taller than she, and strangely graceful for all his plumpness. He cocked a questioning caterpillar eyebrow.

"I dislike mysteries and conjuring tricks," said the Countess. "Keep your hypnotism for morons. Good-by, Mr. Hengist."

"Your husband loves you," repeated Hengist. "I know, and so does—Rowley Thorne." He smiled as he flinched. "You

look pale. Rowley Thorne once frightened and angered you, but you know that his knowledge and practise of enchantment is genuine. Suppose he proved that your husband, who was dead—lived again?"

"Lived?" echoed the Countess. "Physically?"

"Yes. But—in another body. Rowley Thorne will show you." He moved a little closer. "Maybe I could show you something, too. About this love we have been discussing."

She slapped him. He turned and departed.

In the lobby, he entered a telephone booth and dialed a number.

"Thorne," he said to the voice that answered, "I carried out instructions. She did as you predicted."

"Splendid," replied the voice, deep and triumphant. "She believes."

SHARON, COUNTESS MONTESECO, did believe.

Alone, she called herself an idiot to accept fantasies; but Hengist had spoken of Rowley Thorne. If Rowley Thorne could raise dread evil spirits—and she had seen him do it—he could raise the spirit of Count Montesecco. The Count alive, in another body of his own; if that was true, what must she do? Would the Count claim her. Was he still selfish and cruel? John Thunstone had always called those traits the unforgiveable sins. If she had not had that disagreement with John Thunstone, a disagreement over trifles which wound up a quarrel . . . the telephone was ringing, and she took up the receiver.

"Aren't we being childish?" John Thunstone's voice asked.

She borrowed strength from her pride. "Perhaps one of us is. You worked hard to say painful things, John."

"You didn't have to work hard to say them. Sharon, I've a plane reservation, to go a considerable distance and dig into un-

pleasant mysteries with Judge Pursuivant. But I'd rather call it off, and take you to a pleasant dinner."

"I—I've a headache, John." Even as she spoke, it was true. A dull throb crawled inside her skull.

"I see." He sounded weary. "Good-by, Sharon. Sorry."

He hung up. The Countess sank into a chair. John Thunstone could have helped—would have helped. Why had she avoided seeing him, when something strange and evil was on the way to happen to her? Had that larval little Hengist hypnotized her enough to make her banish her friends? For John Thunstone was a friend. He was more than that, and she had rebuffed him, and now he'd fly away, she did not know where or for how long.

Downstairs in the lobby, a big man in a dark gray suit left the house telephone. His eyes half-narrowed, and under his small black mustache his lips clamped. John Thunstone had humbled himself to offer peace. It had been refused. Well, just time enough to go home, pack, taxi to the airport.

But then he saw someone emerge from a telephone booth opposite. The man was small and plump, and purposeful as he hurried away. John Thunstone's eyes lost their vexed bafflement, showed recognition.

He entered the same booth, almost coffin-snug for his huge frame. He telephoned to cancel his plane reservation.

ROWLEY THORNE'S garments just missed being seedy, and his linen could have been cleaner. But he strode from the elevator to the door of Countess Montesecco's suite with a confidence that was regal. He was almost as tall as John Thunstone, and burlier. His features showed broad, hawklike, but here and there were slackening. His great skull was bald, or perhaps shaven, and he had

no eyebrows or even lashes to fringe his deep, gunmetal eyes.

He knocked, and inside she ran to the door. She opened it, and a smile of welcome died quickly on her face.

"I'm not who you expected," said Rowley Thorne.

She drew herself up. "I expected no one. Go away."

"You hoped for someone, then. And I'll go, but you'll go with me."

She began to close the door, then paused. "Why?"

"Because your husband has a message for you. . . . Surely you aren't going to flatter me by fearing me?"

"I fear nothing," said Countess Montesecco proudly. "Fear is folly, for people like you to feed on."

"Since you fear nothing, you will come."

"But you're lying about my husband."

His naked head bowed. "If I lie, come and prove it." He turned to go. "Have you a coat?"

He walked along the hallway. Halfway to the elevator, he paused. The Countess came from her room and fell into step beside him, looking never at him, but ahead.

In a taxi, she looked at him.

"No, I have no fear," she said. "Only curiosity. Why are you trying to impress and amaze me?"

"Because you have things I need. Strength and serenity."

"Strength!" She made herself laugh briefly over that. "I thought you were satisfied with your own enchantments, that you needed nothing."

The great bald head shook again. "What enchantment I know and practise I won most painfully and sorrowfully. I swore to renounce personal possessions and affections. And I did." His voice grew dully soft, just for once. "I lost every cent and stick of property that I owned, in tragic ways that made the loss more bitter. My heart—and it truly ached for love—was

torn and anguished, when death took some that I loved, and others turned false or scornful. I paid: why shouldn't I value the commodity I bought?" Now he smiled again. "I have words that some day will be known to all minds, and a will to impose upon all wills. Not world domination, Countess—that's so flat and outworn an idea. I shan't bore you with my own concept of volition and right and profit. But let me assure you of this: I have a will concerning you, and I want your will to be the same. Then neither of us will defeat the other, eh?"

She kept her eyes on mean side streets that flitted by. He continued: "Any living being is a storehouse of power. A sturdy being can give physical strength, a creature of spirit can give spiritual strength. I mean no compliments, only solemn truth when I say that your own spirit is worth my effort, for the profit I can draw from it."

"You plan some sort of sacrifice. I don't think you'll succeed, Mr. Thorne."

"Some day," he sighed, "the world will know me by a name of my own choosing, a name of mastery. Once I tried to draw you into my plans. Your friend Thunstone helped you beat me. Being beaten does not suit me. The experience must be wiped out."

"I see," she said. "Your belief, or worship, or philosophy, or whatever it is, cannot accept failure."

"Exactly," nodded Thorne.

"I don't fear you in the least."

"That's a valiant lie. But you won't try to escape, for you refuse to accept failure, too—and running from me would be failure."

The taxi stopped. Rowley Thorne opened the door and helped her out. They entered the lobby of an aging apartment building.

A porter in a grubby uniform gazed at them, but said nothing. Thorne led

the Countess into an automatic elevator, and pressed the button. They rode twenty floors upward in silence.

Stepping forth into a hall, they mounted half a dozen steps to an entry above. The door opened before Thorne could knock. Hengist stood there, smiling.

"All ready," he reported to Thorne.

"Come," said Thorne to the Countess. They entered a room with drawn blinds. There was no furniture except a small table of Oriental lacquer, on which stood some article the size of a teapot, covered loosely with a napkin.

The Countess paused inside the door. "You sent word that my husband would be here, alive."

Thorne shook his head. "No," he murmured. "I said he would be here in a living body. Not necessarily human, not necessarily even flesh and blood. He is here."

He lifted the napkin from the object on the table.

IT GAVE light, or she thought it gave light. Apparently it was made of glass, with an inner substance that glowed dimly, like foxfire.

"Look closely," Rowley Thorne bade her.

It was supported on four legs, like a tiny article of furniture. A doll's chair of glass. No. Crudely but forcefully it was shaped to resemble an animal. The straight legs were vigorously planted, the body was rounded and strong, the head long and supported on a neck that arched. Two blobs of glass made upthrust ears.

"It's a toy horse," pronounced the Countess. "I think you're wasting our time."

"No toy," Thorne assured her. "Touch it."

She reached out to pick it up, but almost flung it down. Stepping back, she chafed her hands together. "It's warm," she said shakily. "Like—like—"

"Like blood?" prompted Hengist, smiling in the dimness.

"Like a living body," amended Thorne. "A spirit you know lives inside. What you see is an old, old image, sacred once to a cult that has vanished. That cult knew ways to locate and imprison ghosts. Inside the horse is all that made Count Montesecco the kind of man he was."

Both Hengist and Thorne were watching her. She forced herself to touch the horse of glass a second time. Having touched it, she forced herself not to shudder.

"You want me to believe that this phosphorescence is a soul?"

"It has been kept thus so as to convince you. The Count, as I learned, was just such a soul as might be expected to remain wretchedly near the place of his death. A European colleague used spells to snare that soul, and sent it to me. The container is designed for the single purpose of keeping it until—"

"Why a horse?" she asked.

"Horses are exceptional creatures. They are strong, intelligent, full of emotion and spirit.

Remember the kelpie, the *puka*, and Pegasus and the others. There have been horse gods in Norway, Spain, Russia, Greece, even in tropical America. When German wizards foretold the future, they read it in the blood and bowels of horses." Thorne looked from the glass image to the Countess. "Speak to your husband's soul."

"Do you really expect me—"

"I'll show you how." His bald head stooped above the dim-glowing little shape of glass. "You within, do you know this woman?"

The phosphorescence whirled, as vapor whirls in a breeze. The glass head stirred, moved. It lifted, and sagged back.

"You see," said Thorne, "it nodded affirmation."

"Nonsense!" she protested, but her voice

almost broke. "That was an optical illusion, or some piece of stage magic."

"Touch it again. Assure yourself that it is a solid, unjointed glass structure. . . . Satisfied? I'll question it again: The woman is your Countess?"

Another nod.

"You—love her?"

Yet again the glass head dipped.

"I still say it's a trick," said the Countess. "Why I came here I don't know."

"You've forgotten? Wasn't there something said about not being afraid? You came, Countess, to scorn me and to conquer me. You felt that you must show how strong and fearless you could be without John Thunstone. And it's not a trick. Lift the thing. Don't be afraid. Make sure that there are no threads or levers or other mechanism. Now look into it. Deep into it."

SHE felt a flash of pain, as if the subdued glow were too bright for her eyes, but she stared where the radiance was strongest, in the midst of the horse's body. For a moment it seemed as though an eye floated there to return her gaze, an eye she had known and had never expected to see again. The warmth of the glass communicated itself to her hands. She felt, or fancied she felt, a rhythmic pulsing from within the figure.

"Now, questions that only your husband could answer," urged Thorne.

She addressed the object: "If you are who they say you are, you will remember the words I spoke at our last parting."

The glass shape shifted in her hands. Thoughts formed in the depths of her mind, but not thoughts of her own. Those thoughts answered her question:

I remember. You said you would tolerate cruelty, but not lies.

She shuddered and swayed. Rowley Thorne took the figure from her and set it back on the table.

"You believe now, don't you?" he challenged her. "That, I say, is why I kept the soul of your Count in this strange condition—to convince you. Now it shall be transmigrated, to the body of a man. I look forward to an interesting reunion between you and him."

"I'll submit to no more extravagances," she was able to protest.

"Hengist," said Thorne, "take the Countess Montesecco to the observatory."

Hengist laid his hand upon her wrist. When she tried to pull away, he tightened his grip cunningly. Agony swelled along her arm. She had to go with him. He urged her up another flight of stairs.

This second story of the penthouse was a single room, with windows all around. Twilight was coming to the city outside and below. Hengist smiled as he shut the door behind him.

"You came here partially out of bravado, and partly out of adroit suggestion," he said. "Now the bravado is gone, and the suggestion is going. If you are convinced that your husband lives again, in human flesh, will you be bound to him by vows or sentiments?"

He turned the key in the lock. She drew herself up, pale and angry.

"I thought I was a free agent. Why do you lock me in?"

"Because you are shrugging off the last flimsy bond of suggestion. Because you must stay here and see your husband again in the flesh."

She looked around. "In what body—"

"Here," and Hengist placed a pudgy hand on his chest. "I am the body."

She sat down in an armchair. Hengist fumbled in a pocket, and brought out a slim vial. It, too, had something phosphorescent inside.

"I am instructed," he told her, "to drink this concoction and prepare myself to receive a new spirit, that will dominate and replace my own. But," he paused, smiling

sidelong at her. "Why don't we throw it away?"

"Throw it away?"

"Yes, and not be parties to the revival of the Count's life in my body. Keep me just Hengist. I'm Thorne's associate and servitor. He intends, by supernatural means, to house within me the spirit of Count Montesecco. Then you will be constrained and subdued, by use of that spirit in a living body. Your money, for one thing, will become Thorne's. And there are other ways he will triumph over you and your friends."

The Countess remembered that Thorne had spoken of his need for triumph where he had failed.

"Wouldn't you rather have me as Hengist than as Count Montesecco?" Hengist asked again. "I find you attractive. Attractive enough, in fact, to make me wish to stay myself for your sake. What do you think? But think quickly. Because Rowley Thorne will be coming."

ON THE floor below, Rowley Thorne opened a closet. From shelves inside he brought out a walking stick of jointed bamboo, marked in Japanese characters, and a tarnished bronze lamp. This he lighted, and it shed yellow light, dimming the glow within the glass figure as he placed it and the cane upon the table. While he moved and arranged the objects, he kept up a swift, indistinct mutter in a language that could be neither Latin or Greek, but which fell into cadences and rhymes, like some sort of ritual. After a moment he paused, looked around, and brought a dish out of the closet. Into it he threw white powder and red, and tilted the dish to mingle them. Finally he bit his thumb savagely, and dripped blood from it upon the mingled powder.

"That," said a quiet voice, "is one of the most disgusting commonplaces of your dirty ceremonies."

From behind a window-drape slid the broad shoulders and scornful face of John Thunstone.

Rowley Thorne faced him, his own lips writhing back from big, pointed teeth.

"She has rejected you and your help," he snarled. "I know it. I know all about your quarrel. She didn't want you, or she'd have sent for you. Get out."

Thunstone took a step closer. "The Countess, like many women, is not utterly sure what she does want. I followed your little jackal, Hengist, here. Magic of my own—a skeleton key—let me in by a side door. And I listened. I know everything—to stay within the melodramatic pattern you seem to set, I should say that I know all." He took another step. "Since you're so nervous about the Countess's feelings, be glad that I waited until she left to settle with you."

"Get out," said Thorne again. He picked up the cane.

"Spoiling the preparations for your incantation," Thunstone said, in a voice of friendly warning. "I know about this kind of thing, too. How does the little jibber-jabber go? 'He whose dead ghost has no caretaker is looking for a shelter from the night; and who speaks the Black Name, and speaks it now—'"

"Silence!" bawled Thorne. "You'll ruin—"

Thunstone eyed the collection on the table. "That would be a collector's item, yonder. Etruscan, I take it—the Equine Cult of Aradonia. May I look?" He put out a hand.

Thorne threw himself between the table and Thunstone. The cane lifted in his hand and struck at Thunstone's head. The big man dodged sidewise, caught at the cane and pulled.

But the wood seemed to give in his hand, to slide easily away. Thorne was clearing a narrow steel blade from within it. He laughed once, a sharp laugh like

the bark of a fox. Thunstone held a hollow length of cane that had served as sheath for the blade.

"I should have done this long ago," said Thorne, and fell on guard like a fencer. He lunged, speeding his point full at Thunstone's throat.

But Thunstone parried with the hollow cane he held, let the point slither out of line, then struck sharply at Thorne's weapon hand. Wood rang on knuckles, and Thorne dropped his blade with a curse. Thunstone caught it up, breaking it across his knee.

"You'd have found my murder difficult to explain," he said.

Thorne struck at him with his fist, and Thunstone took the blow high on his head. He weaved a little, but countered with both hands, to Thorne's head and body. Thorne staggered back against the table. It toppled.

Something crashed.

Thorne wailed as if his arm had broken. Thunstone moved across the room and snapped a light switch. Turning, he saw Thorne kneeling, almost in tears.

"Yes, yes," Thunstone murmured, as if to soothe him. "The collector's item is gone. Smashed. And what was inside—"

"Do you realize what this means?" jabbered Thorne, rising.

Thunstone nodded. "Perfectly. The captive soul is free—with no prepared haven. Your ceremony had not begun. Count Monteseco undergoes no reincarnation.

"But the ceremony had begun," Thorne insisted. "I'd spoken some of the words—I'd pointed the way to Hengist."

"Ah," said Thunstone. "And if Hengist isn't prepared, that is Hengist's misfortune." He eyed his adversary appraisingly. "Once more, Thorne, I'm leaving you in an embarrassing position."

"You are a stubborn creature," Hengist was saying. "One would think you

actually preferred to be the wife of the Count, and the slave of Rowley Thorne. Well, suppose I don't allow it? Suppose I move for your good, and mine, against his magic? He'll never know that I don't house the soul he sent me, and I can watch for a proper time to— What are you staring at?"

"The transom," said the Countess. "Something moved there."

"The transom's as tight shut as this door." Hengist's fat forefinger twiddled the key in its lock. "Not even Rowley Thorne could enter, unless he got a Hand of Glory somewhere on short notice. Now then, to assume? Even if you find me repulsive, you might become accustomed to me later. But what's the matter with the transom now?"

"Something moved there," she said again.

"A shadow," Hengist offered loftily.

"But it has eyes—and it shines—"

Something drifted through the closed door, as fog drifts through gauze.

Hengist goggled, backed up, and whimpered. The cloud of dead-glowing vapor billowed, churned, and abruptly lengthened. Its fore part lifted. It was shaping itself, dimly and roughly, into a form that

reared, a form with a long tossing head, an arched neck, and lean forelimbs with lumpy extremities.

Hengist's whine shrilled into a scream. He tried to get away, but floundered into a corner. Those forelegs came down upon him, and he fell, and the great shining cloud was upon him.

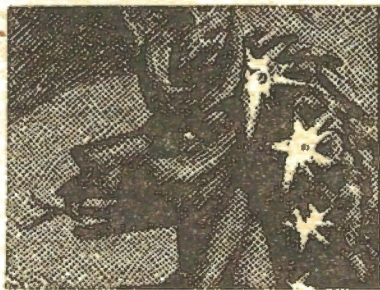
Then the Countess remembered that the key was in the lock. She unfastened the door and ran for the stairs. She might have fallen down them, but John Thunstone was coming up and caught her.

As far as she could remember later, he did not speak then or for quite a while afterward. He shepherded her to the elevator, out into the street, and home in a taxi.

He did not even say good-night.

The next day, when he took her to lunch, he came as close as he would ever come to discussing the adventure. "The papers," he remarked, "are interested in a man who was found dead in a penthouse. Because he seems to have been beaten all over by heavy, blunt weapons. The police say it's as if a horse had trampled him to death."

Then he gave his attention to ordering the soup.



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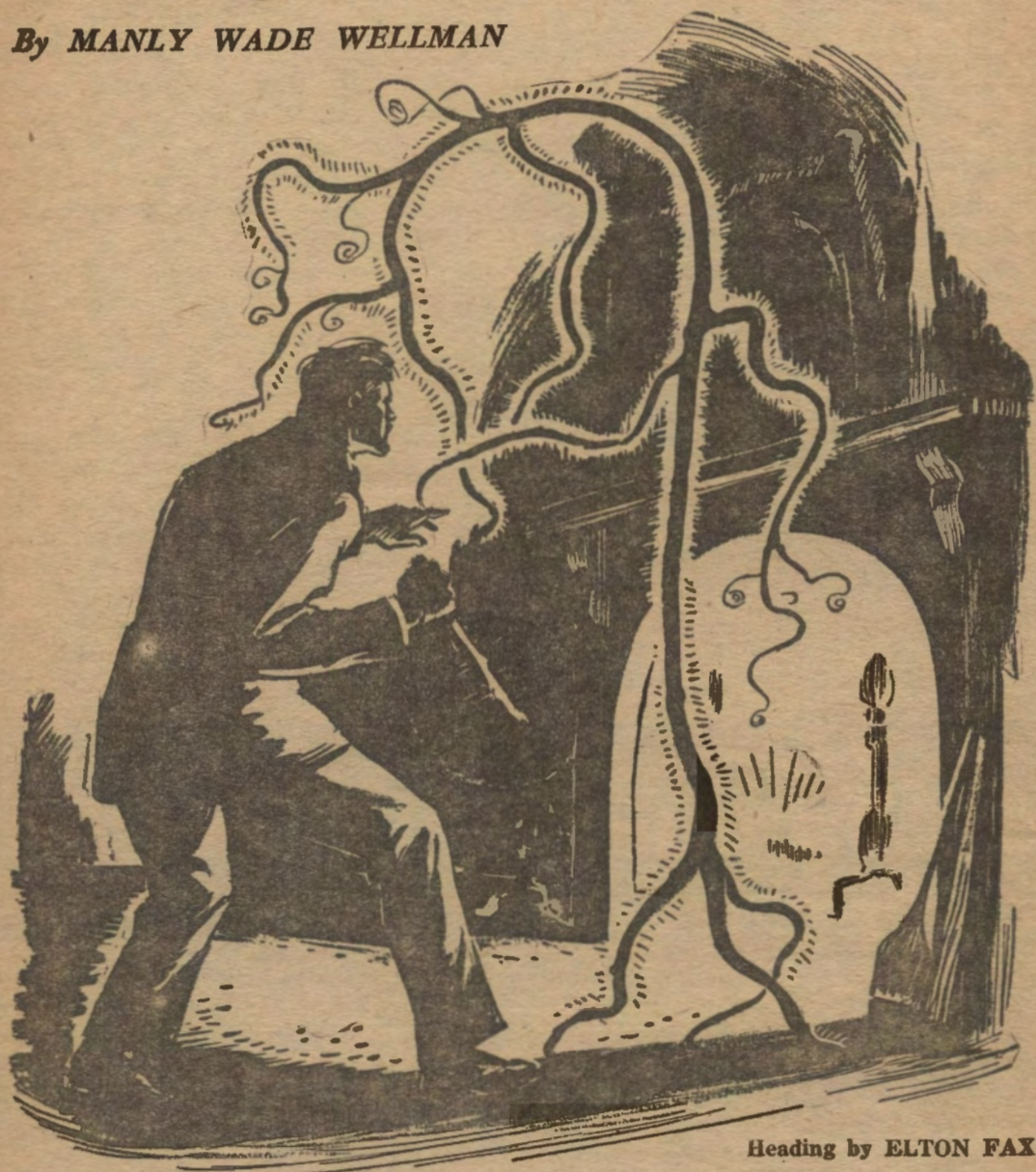
"Unpublished Story"

By H. Bedford-Jones



The Letters of Cold Fire

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN



Heading by ELTON FAX

THE El had once curved around a corner and along this block of the narrow rough-paved street. Since it had been taken up, the tenements on either side seemed like dissipated old vagabonds, ready to collapse without the support of

that scaffolding. Between two such buildings of time-dulled red brick sagged a third, its brickwork thickly coated with cheap yellow paint that might well be the only thing holding it together. The lower story was taken up by the dingiest of hand laundries,

*Once in the school beneath the ground the scholar remains until he has
been taught, or—goes away in the dark!*

and a side door led to the lodgings above. Rowley Thorne addressed a shabby dull-eyed landlord in a language both of them knew: "Cavet Leslie is—" he began.

The landlord shook his head slowly. "Does not leave his bed."

"The doctor sees him?"

"Twice a day. Told me there was no hope, but Cavet Leslie won't go to a hospital."

"Thanks," and Thorne turned to the door. His big hand was on the knob, its fingertips hooked over the edge. He was a figure inordinately bulky but hard, like a barrel on legs. His head was bald, and his nose hooked, making him look like a wise, wicked eagle.

"Tell him," he requested, "that a friend was coming to see him."

"I never talk to him," said the landlord, and Thorne bowed, and left, closing the door behind him.

Outside the door, he listened. The landlord had gone back into his own dim quarters. Thorne at once tried the knob—the door opened, for in leaving he had taken off the night lock.

He stole through the windowless vestibule and mounted stairs so narrow that Thorne's shoulders touched both walls at once. The place had that old-clothes smell of New York's ancient slum houses. From such rookeries the Five Points and Dead Rabbits gangsters had issued to their joyous gang wars of old, hoodlums had thronged to the Draft Riots of 1863 and the protest against Macready's performance of *Macbeth* at the Astor Place Opera House . . . the hallway above was as narrow as the stairs, and darker, but Thorne knew the way to the door he sought. It opened readily, for its lock was long out of order.

It was more a cell than a room. The plaster, painted a dirt-disguising green, fell away in flakes. Filth and cobwebs clogged the one backward-looking window. The man on the shabby cot stirred, sighed and turned his thin fungus-white face toward the door. "Who's there?" he quavered wearily.

Rowley Thorne knelt quickly beside him, bending close like a bird of prey above a carcass. "You were Cavet Leslie," he said. "Try to remember."

A thin twig of a hand crept from under the ragged quilt. It rubbed over closed eyes. "Forbidden," croaked the man. "I'm forbidden to remember. I forget all but—but—" the voice trailed off, then finished with an effort:

"My lessons."

"You were Cavet Leslie. I am Rowley Thorne."

"Rowley Thorne!" The voice was stronger, quicker. "That name will be great in hell."

"It will be great on earth," pronounced Rowley Thorne earnestly. "I came to get your book. Give it to me, Leslie. It's worth both our lives, and more."

"Don't call me Leslie. I've forgotten Leslie—since—"

"Since you studied in the Deep School," Thorne finished for him. "I know. You have the book. It is given to all who finish the studies there."

"Few finish," moaned the man on the cot. "Many begin, few finish."

"The school is beneath ground," Thorne said, as if prompting him. "Remember."

"Yes, beneath ground. No light must come. It would destroy—what is taught. Once there, the scholar remains until he has been taught, or—goes away in the dark."

"The school book has letters of cold fire," prompted Thorne.

"Letters of cold fire," echoed the thin voice. "They may be read in the dark. Once a day—once a day—a trap opens, and a hand shaggy with dark hair thrusts in food. I finished—I was in that school for seven years—or a hundred!" He broke off, whimpering. "Who can say how long?"

"Give me your book," insisted Thorne. "It is here somewhere."

THE man who would not be called Cavet Leslie rose on an elbow. It was a mighty effort for his fleshless body. He still held his eyes tight shut, but turned his face to Thorne's. "How do you know?"

"It's my business to know. I say certain spells—and certain voices whisper back. They cannot give me the wisdom I seek, but they say that it is in your book. Give me the book."

"Not even to you, Rowley Thorne. You

are of the kidney of the Deep School, but the book is only for those who study in buried darkness for years. For years—"

"The book!" said Thorne sharply. His big hand closed on the bony shoulder, his finger-ends probed knowingly for a nerve center. The man who had been in the Deep School wailed.

"You hurt me!"

"I came for the book. I'll have it."

"I'll call on spirits to protect me—*Tobkta*—"



What else he may have said was muddled into a moan as Thorne shifted his hand to clamp over the trembling mouth. He prisoned the skinny jaw as a hostler with a horse, and shoved Cavet Leslie's head down against the mattress. With his other thumb he pried up an eyelid. Convulsively the tormented one freed his mouth for a moment.

"Oooooooh!" he whined. "Don't make me see the light—not after so many years—"

"The book," said Thorne once more, "or I'll prop your eyelids open with toothpicks and let the light burn into your brain."

"*Tobkta tarvaron*—"

Thorne stopped the mouth as before, and again pried up a lid. When the gaunt figure still twitched, he pinned it with pressure of his weight.

"The book. If you'll give it up, hold up a finger."

A hand trembled, closed—all but the forefinger. Thorne released his grip.

"Where?"

"In the mattress—"

At once, and with all his strength, Thorne chopped down with the hard edge of his hand, full at the bobbing, trembling throat. It was like an axe on a knotted log. The man who had been Cavet Leslie writhed, gasped, and slackened abruptly. Thorne caught at a meager wrist, his fingers seeking the pulse. He stood silent for a minute, then nodded and smiled to himself.

"Finished," he muttered. "That throat-chop is better than a running noose."

He tumbled the body from the cot, felt quickly all over the mattress. His hand paused at a lump, tore at the ticking. He drew into view a book, not larger than a school speller. It was bound in some sort of dark untanned hide, on which grew rank, coarse hair, black as soot.

Thorne thrust it under his coat and went out.

JOHN THUNSTONE sat alone in his study. It was less of a study than a lounge—no fewer than three chairs, were arranged on the floor, soft, well-hollowed chairs within easy reach of bookshelf, smoking stand and coffee table. There was a leather-covered couch as well. For Thunstone considered work of the brain to be as fatiguing as work of the body. He liked physical comfort when writing or researching.

Just now he sat in the most comfortable of the three chairs, facing a grate in which burned one of the few authentic fires of New York. He was taller than Rowley Thorne and quite as massive, perhaps even harder of body though not as tense. His face, with its broken nose and small, trim mustache, might have been that of a very savage and physical-minded man, except for the height of the well-combed cranium above it. That made his head the head of a thinker. His hands were so large that one looked twice to see that they were fine. His dark eyes could be brilliant, frank, enigmatic, narrow, or laughing as they willed.

Open on his lap lay a large gray book, with a backing of gilt-lettered red. He pondered a passage on the page open before him:

Having shuffled and cut the cards as here described, select one at random. Study the device upon it for such time as you count a slow twenty. Then fix your eyes on a point before you, and gaze unwinkingly and without moving until it seems that a closed door is before you, with upon its panel the device of the card you have chosen. Clarify the image in your mind, and keep it there until the door seems to swing open, and you feel that you can enter and see, hear or otherwise experience what may happen beyond that door. . . .

Similar, pondered John Thunstone, to the Chinese wizard-game of Yi King, as investigated and experimented upon by W. B. Seabrook. He was glad that he, and not someone less fitted for such studies, had happened upon the book and the strange cards in that Brooklyn junk-shop. Perhaps this was an anglicized form of the Yi King book—he said over in his mind the strange, archaic doggerel penned by some unknown hand on the fly-leaf:

This book is mine, with many more,
Of evilness and dismal lore.
That I may of the Devil know
And school myself to work him woe.
Such lore Saint Dunstan also read,
So that the Cross hath firmer stead.
My path with honor aye hath been—
No better is than that, I ween.

Who had written it? What had befallen him, that he sold his strange book in a second-hand store? Perhaps, if the spell would open a spirit-door, Thunstone would know.

He cut the cards on the stand beside him. The card he saw was stamped with a simple, colored drawing of a grotesque half-human figure, covered with spines, and flaunting bat-wings. Thunstone smiled slightly, sagged down in the chair. His eyes, narrowing, fixed themselves in the heart of the red flame. . . .

The illusion came sooner than he had thought. At first it was tiny, like the decorated lid of a cigar-box, then grew and grew in size and clarity—shutting out, it seemed, even the firelight into which Thunstone had stared. It seemed green and mas-

sive, and the bat-winged figure upon it glowed dully, as if it were a life-size inlay of mother of pearl. He fixed his attention upon it, found his eyes quartering the door-surface to seek the knob or latch. They saw it, something like a massive metal hook. After a moment, the door swung open, as if the weight of his gaze had pushed it inward.

He remembered what the book then directed: *Arise from your body and walk through the door.* But he felt no motion, physical or spiritual. For through the open door he saw only his study—the half of his study that was behind his back, reflected as in a mirror. No, for in a mirror left would become right. Here was the rearward part of the room exactly as he knew it.

And not empty!

A MOVING, stealthy blackness was there, flowing or creeping across the rug between a chair and a smoking-stand like an octopus on a sea-bottom.

Thunstone watched. It was not a cloud nor a shadow, but something solid if not clearly shaped. It came into plainer view, closer, at the very threshold of the envisioned door. There it began to rise, a towering lean manifestation of blackness—

It came to Thunstone's mind that, if the scene within the doorway was faithfully a reproduction of the room behind him, then he could see to it almost the exact point where his own chair was placed. In other words, if something dark and indistinct and stealthy was uncoiling itself there, the something was directly behind where he sat.

He did not move, did not even quicken his breath. The shape—it had a shape now, like a leafless tree with a narrow starved stem and moving tendril-like branches—aspired almost to the ceiling of the vision-room. The tendrils swayed, as if in a gentle wind, then writhed and drooped. Drooped toward the point where might be the head of a seated man—if such a thing were truly behind him, it was reaching toward his head.

Thunstone threw himself forward from the chair, straight at the vision-door. As he came well away from where he had sat, he whipped his big body straight and, cat-light despite his wrestler's bulk, spun around on

the balls of his feet. Of the many strange spells and charms he had read in years of strange study, one came to his lips, from the *Egyptian Secrets*:

"Stand still, in the name of heaven! Give neither fire nor flame nor punishment!"

He saw the black shadowy shape, tall behind his chair, its crowning tendrils dangling down in the very space which his body had occupied. The light of the sinking fire made indistinct its details and outlines, but for the instant it was solid. Thunstone knew better than to retreat a step before such a thing, but he was within arm's reach of a massive old desk. A quick clutch and heave opened a drawer, he thrust in his hand and closed it on a slender stick, no more than a roughcut billet of whitethorn. Lifting the bit of wood like a dagger, he moved toward the half-blurred intruder. He thrust outward with the pointed end of the whitethorn stick.

"I command, I compel in the name of—" began Thunstone.

The entity writhed. Its tendrils spread and hovered, so that it seemed for the moment like a gigantic scrawny arm, spreading its fingers to signal for mercy. Even as Thunstone glared and held out his whitethorn, the black outline lost its clarity, dissolving as ink dissolves in water. The darkness became gray, stirred together and shrank away toward the door. It seemed to filter between panel and jamb. The air grew clearer, and Thunstone wiped his face with the hand that did not hold the whitethorn.

He stooped and picked up the book that had spilled from his lap. He faced the fire. The door, if it had ever existed otherwise than in Thunstone's mind, had gone like the tendril-shape. Thunstone took a pipe from his smoking stand and put it in his mouth. His face was deadly pale, but the hand that struck a match was as steady as a bronze bracket.

Thunstone placed the book carefully on the desk. "Whoever you are who wrote the words," he said aloud, "and wherever you are at this moment—thank you for helping me to warn myself."

He moved around the study, peering at the rug on which that shadow image had reared itself, prodding the pile, even kneeling to sniff. He shook his head.

"No sign, no trace—yet for a moment it

was real and potent enough—only one person I know has the wit and will to attack me like that—"

He straightened up.

"Rowley Thorne!"

Leaving the study, John Thunstone donned hat and coat. He descended through the lobby of his apartment house and stopped a taxi on the street outside.

"Take me to Eighty-eight Musgrave Lane, in Greenwich Village," he directed the driver.

THE little bookshop looked like a dingy cave. To enter it, Thunstone must go down steps from the sidewalk, past an almost obliterated sign that read: BOOKS—ALL KINDS. Below ground the cave-motif was emphasized. It was as though one entered a ragged grotto among most peculiar natural deposits of books—shelves and stands and tables, and heaps of them on the floor like outcroppings. A bright naked bulb hung at the end of a ceiling cord, but it seemed to shed light only in the outer room. No beam, apparently, could penetrate beyond a threshold at the rear; yet Thunstone had, as always, the non-visual sense of a greater book-cave there, wherein perhaps clumps of volumes hung somehow from the ceiling, like stalactites. . . .

"I thought you'd be here, Mr. Thunstone," came a genial snarl from a far corner, and the old proprietress stumped forward. She was heavy-set, shabby, white-haired, but had a proud beaked face, and eyes and teeth like a girl of twenty. "Professor Rhine and Joseph Dunninger can write the books and give the exhibitions of thought transference. I just sit here and practise it, with people whose minds can tune in to mine—like you, Mr. Thunstone. You came, I daresay, for a book."

"Suppose," said Thunstone, "that I wanted a copy of the *Necronomicon*?"

"Suppose," rejoined the old woman, "that I gave it to you?" She turned to a shelf, pulled several books out, and poked her withered hand into the recess behind. "Nobody else that I know would be able to look into the *Necronomicon* without getting into trouble. To anyone else the price would be prohibitive. To you, Mr. Thun—"

"Leave that book where it is!" he bade

her sharply. She glanced up with her bright youthful eyes, slid the volumes back into their place, and turned to wait for what he would say.

"I knew you had it," said Thunstone. "I wanted to be sure that you still had it. And that you would keep it."

"I'll keep it, unless you ever want it," promised the old woman.

"Does Rowley Thorne ever come here?"

"Thorne? The man like a burly old bald eagle? Not for months—he hasn't the money to pay the prices I'd ask him for even cheap reprints of Albertus Magnus."

"Good-by, Mrs. Harlan," said Thunstone. "You're very kind."

"So are you kind," said the old woman. "To me and to countless others. When you die, Mr. Thunstone, and may it be long ever from now, a whole generation will pray your soul into glory. Could I say something?"

"Please do." He paused in the act of going.

"Thorne came here once, to ask me a favor. It was about a poor sick man who lives—if you can call it living—in a tenement across town. His name was Cavet Leslie, and Thorne said he would authorize me to pay any price for a book Cavet Leslie had."

"Not the *Necronomicon*?" prompted Thunstone.

Her white head shook. "Thorne asked for the *Necronomicon* the day before, and I said I hadn't one to sell him—which was the truth. I had it in mind that he thought Cavet Leslie's book might be a substitute."

"The name of Leslie's book?"

She crinkled her face until it looked like a wise walnut. "He said it had no name. I was to say to Leslie, 'your schoolbook.'"

"Mmmm," hummed Thunstone, frowning. "What was the address?"

She wrote it on a bit of paper. Thunstone took it and smiled down.

"Good-by again, Mrs. Harlan. Some books *must* be kept in existence, I know, despite their danger. My sort of scholarship needs them. But you're the best and wisest person to keep them."

She stared after him for moments following his departure. A black cat came silently forth and rubbed its head against her.

"If I was really to do magic with these

books," she told the animal, "I'd cut forty years off my age—and take John Thunstone clear away from that Countess Montesecco, who will never, never do him justice!"

THERE was not much to learn at the place where Cavet Leslie had kept his poor lodgings. The landlord could not understand English, and Thunstone had to try two other languages before he learned that Leslie had been ill, had been under treatment by a charity physician, and had died earlier that day, apparently from some sort of throttling spasm. For a dollar, Thunstone gained permission to visit the squalid death-chamber.

The body was gone, and Thunstone probed into every corner of the room. He found the ripped mattress, pulled away the flap of ticking and studied the rectangular recess among the wads of ancient padding. A book had been there. He touched the place—it had a strange chill. Then he turned quickly, gazing across the room.

Some sort of shape had been there, a shape that faded as he turned, but which left an impression. Thunstone whistled softly.

"Mrs. Harlan couldn't get the book," he decided. "Thorne came—and succeeded. Now, which way to Thorne?"

The street outside was dark. Thunstone stood for a moment in front of the dingy tenement, until he achieved again the sense of something watching, approaching. He turned again, and saw or sensed, the shrinking away of a stealthy shadow. He walked in that direction.

The sense of the presence departed, but he walked on in the same direction, until he had a feeling of aimlessness in the night. Then again he stood, with what unconcern he could make apparent, until there was a whisper in his consciousness of threat. Whirling, he followed it as before. Thus he traveled for several blocks, changing direction once. Whatever was spying upon him or seeking to ambush him, it was retreating toward a definite base of operations. . . . At length he was able to knock upon a certain door in a certain hotel.

Rowley Thorne opened to him, standing very calm and even triumphant in waistcoat and shirtsleeves.

"Come in, Thunstone," he said, in mock-

ing cordiality. "This is more than I had dared hope for."

"I was able to face and chase your hound-thing, whatever it is," Thunstone told him, entering. "It led me here."

"I knew that," nodded Thorne, his shaven head gleaming dully in the brown-seeming light of a single small desk lamp. "Won't you make yourself comfortable? You see," and he took up a shaggy-covered book from the arm of an easy chair, "I am impelled at last to accept the idea of a writing which, literally, tells one everything he needs to know."

"You killed Cavet Leslie for it, didn't you?" inquired Thunstone, and dropped his hat on the bed.

Thorne clicked his tongue. "That's bad luck for somebody, a hat on the bed. Cavet Leslie had outlived everything but a scrap of his physical self. Somewhere he's outliving that, for I take it that his experiences and studies have unfitted his soul for any conventional hereafter. But he left me a rather amusing legacy." And he dropped his eyes to the open book.

"I should be flattered that you concentrated first of all in immobilizing me," observed Thunstone, leaning his great shoulder against the door-jamb.

"Flattered? But surely not surprised. After all, you've hampered me again and again in reaping a harvest of—"

"Come off it, Thorne. You're not even honest as a worshipper of evil. You don't care whether you establish a cult of Satan or not."

Thorne pursed his hard lips. "I venture to say you're right. I'm not a zealot. Cavet Leslie was. He entered the Deep School—know about it?"

"I do," Thunstone told him. "Held in a cellar below a cellar—somewhere on this continent. I'll find it some day, and put an end to the curriculum."

"Leslie entered the Deep School," Thorne continued, "and finished all the study it had to offer. He finished himself as a being capable of happiness, too. He could not look at the light, or summon the strength to walk, or even sit. Probably death was a relief to him—though, not knowing what befell him after death, we cannot be certain. What I'm summing up to is that he endured that

wretched life underground to get the gift of this text book. Now I have it, without undergoing so dreadful an ordeal. Don't reach out for it, Thunstone. You couldn't read it, anyway."

He held it forward, open. The pages showed dull and blank.

"They're written in letters of cold fire," reminded Thunstone. "Letters that show only in the dark."

"Shall we make it dark, then?"

THORNE switched off the lamp.

Thunstone, who had not stirred from his lounging stance at the door, was aware at once that the room was most completely sealed. Blackness was absolute in it. He could not even judge of dimension or direction. Thorne spoke again, from the midst of the choking gloom:

"Clever of you, staying beside the door. Do you want to try to leave?"

"It's no good running away from evil," Thunstone replied. "I didn't come to run away again."

"But try to open the door," Thorne almost begged, and Thunstone put out his hand to find the knob. There was no knob, and no door. Of a sudden, Thunstone was aware that he was not leaning against a door-jamb any more. There was no door-jamb, or other solidity, against which to lean.

"Don't you wish you knew where you were?" jeered Thorne. "I'm the only one who knows, for it's written here on the page for me to see—in letters of Cold Fire."

Thunstone took a stealthy step in the direction of the voice. When Thorne spoke again, he had evidently fallen back out of reach.

"Shall I describe the place for you, Thunstone? It's in the open somewhere. A faint breeze blows," and as he spoke, Thunstone felt the breeze, warm and feeble and foul as the breath of some disgusting little animal. "And around us are bushes and trees. They're part of a thick growth, but just here they are sparse. Because, not more than a dozen step away, is open country. I've brought you to the borderland of a most interesting place, Thunstone, merely by speaking of it."

Thunstone took another step. His feet were on loose earth, not on carpet. A peb-

ble turned and rattled under his shoe-sole.

"You're where you always wanted to be," he called to Thorne. "Where by saying a thing, you can make it so. But many things will need to be said before life suits you." He tried a third step, silently this time. "Who will believe?"

"Everybody will believe." Thorne was almost airy. "Once a fact is demonstrated, it is no longer wonderful. Hypnotism was called magic in its time, and became accepted science. So it is being achieved with thought-transference, by experimentation at Duke University and on radio programs in New York. So it will be when I tell of my writings, very full and very clear—but haven't we been too long in utter darkness?"

ON THE instant, Thunstone could see a little. Afterwards he tried to decide what color that light, or mock-light, actually was. Perhaps it was a lizardy green, but he was never sure. It revealed, ever so faintly, the leafless stunted growths about him, the bare dry-seeming ground from which they sprang, the clearing beyond them. He could not be sure of horizon or sky.

Something moved, not far off. Thorne, by the silhouette. Thunstone saw the flash of Thorne's eyes, as though they gave their own light.

"This country," Thorne said, "may be one of several places. Another dimension—do you believe in more dimensions than these? Or a spirit world of some kind. Or another age of the world we know. I brought you here, Thunstone, without acting or even speaking—only by reading in my book."

Thunstone carefully slid a hand inside his pocket. His forefinger touched something smooth, heavy, rectangular. He knew what it was—a lighter, given him on an occasion of happy gratitude by Sharon, the Countess Montesecco.

"Cold fire," Thorne was saying. "These letters and words are of a language known only in the Deep School—but the sight of them is enough to convey knowledge. Enough, also, to create and direct. This land is spacious enough, don't you think, to support other living creatures than ourselves?"

Thunstone made out blots of black gloom in the green gloom of the clearing—immense, gross blots, that moved slowly but

knowingly toward the bushes. And somewhere behind him a great massive bulk made a dry crashing in the strange shrubbery.

"Are such things hungry?" mused Thorne. "They will be, if I make them so by a thought. Thunston, I think I've done enough to occupy you. Now I'm ready to leave you here, also by a thought—taking with me the book with letters of cold fire. You can't have that cold fire—"

"I have warm fire," said Thunstone, and threw himself.

It was a powerful lunge, unthinkable swift. Thunstone is, among other things, a trained athlete. His big body crashed against Thorne's, and the two of them grappled and went sprawling among the brittle twigs of one of the bushes. As Thorne fell, undermost, he flung up the hand that held the book, as if to put it out of Thunstone's reach. But Thunstone's hand shot out, too, and it held something—the lighter. A flick of his thumb, and flame sprang out, warm orange flame in a sudden spurting tongue that for a moment licked into the coarse shaggy hair of the untanned hide that bound the book.

Thorne howled, and dropped the thing. A moment later, he pulled loose and jumped up. Thunstone was up, too, moving to block Thorne off from the book. Flame grew and flurried behind him, into a paler light, as if burning something fat and rotten.

"It'll be ruined!" cried Thorne, and hurled himself low, like a blocker on the football field. An old footballer himself, Thunstone crouched, letting his hard knee-joint come in contact with Thorne's incharging bald skull. With a grunt, Thorne fell flat, rolled over and came erect again.

"Put out that fire, Thunstone!" he bawled. "You may destroy us both!"

"I'll chance that," Thunstone muttered, moving again to fence him off from the burning book.

Thorne returned to the struggle. One big hand made a talon of itself, snatching at Thunstone's face. Thunstone ducked beneath the hand, jammed his own shoulder up under the pit of the lifted arm, and heaved. Thorne staggered back, stumbled. He fell, and came to his hands and knees, waiting. His face, upturned to Thunstone,

was like a mask of horror carved to terrorize the worshippers in some temple of demons.

It was plain to see that face, for the fire of the book blazed up with a last ardent leap of radiance. Then it died. Thunstone, taking time to glance, saw only glowing charred fragments of leaves, and ground them with a quick thrust of his heel.

DARKNESS again, without even the green mock-light. Thunston felt no breeze, heard no noise of swaying bushes or stealthy, ponderous shape-movement—he could not even hear Thorne's breathing.

He took a step sidewise, groping. His hand found a desk-edge, then the standard of a small lamp. He found a switch and pressed it.

Again he was in Thorne's hotel room, and Thorne was groggily rising to his feet.

When Thorne had cleared his head by shaking it, Thunstone had taken a sheaf of papers from the desk and was glancing quickly through them.

"Suppose," he said, gently but loftily, "that we call the whole thing a little trick of imagination."

"If you call it that, you will be lying," Thorne said between set teeth on which blood was smeared.

"A lie told in a good cause is the whitest of lies . . . this writing would be a document of interest if it would convince."

"The book," muttered Thorne. "The book would convince. I whisked you to a land beyond imagination, with only a grain of the power that book held."

"What book?" inquired Thunstone. He looked around. "There's no book."

"You set it afire. It burned, in that place where we fought—its ashes remain, while we come back here because its power is gone."

Thunstone glanced down at the papers he had picked up. "Why talk of burning things? I wouldn't burn this set of notes for anything. It will attract other attentions than mine."

His eyes rose to fix Thorne's. "Well, you fought me again, Thorne. And I turned you back."

"He who fights and runs away—" Rowley Thorne found the strength to laugh. "You know the rest, Thunstone. You have to let

me run away this time, and at our next fight I'll know better how to deal with you."

"You shan't run away," said Thunstone. He put a cigarette in his mouth and kindled it with the lighter he still held in his hand.

Thorne hooked his heavy thumbs in his vest. "You'll stop me? I think not. Because we're back in conventional lands, Thunstone."

"If you lay hands on me again, it'll be a fight to the death. We're both big and strong. You might kill me, but I'd see that you did. Then you'd be punished for murder. Perhaps executed." Thorne's pale, pointed tongue licked his hard lips. "Nobody would believe you if you tried to explain."

"No, nobody would believe," agreed Thunstone gently. "That's why I'm leaving you to do the explaining."

"I!" cried Thorne, and laughed again. "Explain what? To whom?"

"On the way here," said Thunstone, "I made a plan. In the lobby downstairs, I telephoned for someone to follow me—no, not the police. A doctor. This will be the doctor now."

A slim, gray-eyed man was coming in. Behind him moved two blocky, watchful attendants in white jackets. Silently Thunstone handed the doctor the papers that he had taken from the desk.

The doctor looked at the first page, then the second. His gray eyes brightened with professional interest. Finally he approached Thorne.

"Are you the gentleman Mr. Thunstone asked me to see?" he inquired. "You—yes, you look rather weary and overwrought. Perhaps a rest, with nothing to bother you—"

THORNE'S face writhed. "You! You dare to suggest!" He made a threatening gesture, but subsided as the two white-coated men moved toward him from either side. "You're insolent," he went on, more quietly. "I'm no more crazy than you are."

"Of course not," agreed the doctor. He looked at the notes again, grunted, folded the sheets and stowed them carefully in an inside pocket. Thunstone gave a little nod of general farewell, took his hat from the bed, and strolled carelessly out.

"Of course, you're not crazy," said the doctor again. "Only—tired. Now, if you'll answer a question or two—"

"What questions?" blazed Thorne.

"Well, is it true that you believe you can summon spirits and work miracles, merely by exerting your mind?"

Thorne's wrath exploded hysterically. "You'd soon see what I could do if I had that book!"

"What book?"

"Thunstone destroyed it—burned it—"

"Oh, please!" begged the doctor good-naturedly. "You're talking about John Thunstone, you know! There isn't any book, there never was a book. You need a rest, I tell you. Come along."

Thorne howled like a beast and clutched at his tormentor. The doctor moved smoothly out of reach.

"Bring him out to the car," said the doctor to the two men in white coats.

At once they slid in to close quarters, each clutching one of Thorne's arms. He snarled

and struggled, but the men, with practised skill, clamped and twisted his wrists. Subdued, he walked out between them because he must.

THUNSTONE and the Countess Montesecco were having cocktails at their favorite rear table in a Forty-seventh Street restaurant. They were known and liked there, and not even a waiter would disturb them unless signalled for.

"Tell me," said the countess, "what sort of fantastic danger were you tackling last night?"

"I was in no danger," John Thunstone smiled.

"But I know you were. I went to the concert, and then the reception, but all the time I had the most overpowering sense of your struggle and peril. I was wearing the cross you gave me, and I held it in my hand and prayed for you—prayed hour after hour—"

"That," said Thunstone, "was why I was in no danger."

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John Thunstone's Inheritance

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Heading by ELTON FAX

IT WAS not a first-rate hotel, not even for that section of Manhattan, but Sabine Loel's drawing room on the seventh floor was handsomely kept and softly lighted. Sabine Loel herself was worth looking at twice, a tall, mature woman of a figure both opulent and graceful. She had splendid black eyes and slim white hands that half-concealed themselves in the wide sleeves of her black gown. Her dark hair, brindled with one lock of white, she wore combed well back from her almost Grecian face, and her mouth, though sullen, was curved and warm.

*They say I want to practice evil enchantments, for
I called him twice and the third time . . . !*

"Mr. Thunstone," she greeted her caller, with a formality that half sneered. "Won't you sit down? I hope this is going to be a friendly visit—last time we met you were downright unpleasant about my approach to occultism. You did say, however," and she smiled slightly, "that I was attractive."

Thunstone sat down across the writing desk from her. He was larger for a man than she for a woman, with a thoughtful rectangular face and a short, neat moustache black enough for an Arab. His deep-set bright eyes did not flicker under her searching gaze.

"You're entirely too attractive," he assented deeply, "especially as you have potentialities for danger, in your unusual attitudes toward, and studies of, the supernatural. However, I'm here on business."

"Business?" she echoed, and her eyes glowed as his big left hand thrust itself into the inside pocket of his jacket, where his wallet would be.

But he brought out a document instead, something legal-looking in a blue folder, so creased and doubled as to exhibit one typewritten paragraph. He passed it to Sabine Loel, who leaned back to let light fall upon it:

... and to John Thunstone, the character and success of whose investigations into psychical matters I have observed with interest, I do hereby bequeath my house known as Bertram Dower, situated one mile north of the town of Darrington, county of ...

"I know about Bertram Dower House," said Sabine Loel. "What student of the occult hasn't heard of it? Conan Doyle said the atmosphere alone proved the existence of spirit forces; and John Mulholland isn't all skeptic when he talks about it. The house belonged to old James Garrett, who wouldn't let anyone enter. And there's that story of hidden treasure—" She broke off, and licked her full, curved lips with a tiny pointed tongue. "What's this on the margin? The bit, written in ink?"

"Apparently it's for me," said Thunstone, "but it's cryptic. Something to the effect of 'Call him twice, and the third time he comes uncalled.' Read on."

STRETCHING his long arm across the desk, he turned the folded will and showed another passage:

... with the understanding that the said John Thunstone shall institute a serious and complete study of the phenomena which have excited so much discussion...

When Sabine Loel had finished, Thunstone took the document back and restored it to his pocket.

"I'm in honor bound to study the place, even if I weren't eager to do so. But Garrett was deceived in one particular—I'm not psychic, not a medium. You are. I want you to come with me."

She did not reply at once. Finally: "I didn't know you knew James Garrett, Mr. Thunstone."

"I didn't. I knew only about his place, and the strange stories. He seems to know me only by my flattering reputation. But that's beside the point. Will you come?"

She smiled, with a great deal of maddening mystery. "Why not ask your friend the Frenchman—Jules de Grandin? You and he are very close. Are you surprised to learn that I keep some watch on your movements?"

He answered her questions in order. "I invited de Grandin, but he and Dr. Trowbridge have all they can do in that line just now. No, I'm not so much surprised as warned."

Still she temporized. "Once you suggested, in public, that I was dishonest in claiming to communicate with the spirit world."

"Yet you have the power to communicate, and to do honest business when you wish. If a broker sells spurious stock, can't he change and sell honest shares? I've kept track of you, too. I venture to say that you need money now, this minute."

Again he put his hand into his inside pocket.

This time he brought forth a note-case, from which he took several bills. She accepted them gravely but readily, folded them, small between her slender, white fingers.

"When do we start?" she asked.

"Let's have an early tea, then I'll fetch my car around. There's a storm threatening,

but we can reach Darrington before it breaks."

"I'll get my wraps," she said.

IT WAS twilight when they passed through the little town of Darrington. Thunstone, who had a marked bit of road map to guide him drove up a steep, winding stretch of concrete where he had to put his car into second gear. Trees, their winter-stripped branches making strange traceries against the last pallor of light in the sky, crowded thickly at each brink of the pavement. Almost at the top of the slope, he turned off upon a very rough and narrow dirt road, which brought them at last to Bertram Dower. The house was a tall, sturdy-looking structure, almost like a fort. As they rolled into the yard, sleet began to fall.

"I trust," said Sabine Loel in a murmurous, mocking voice, "that you came prepared with wolfbane and holy water."

"Wolfbane's out of season," replied Thunstone, and made the car creep into a tumbledown shed at the rear of the house. "And I'm no priest, so I bring no holy things. Aren't there other ways of confronting the supernatural?" Shutting off the engine, he turned on the inner lights. Sabine Loel's face, a frosty white oval among dark furs, turned sidewise to him.

"This inheritance of yours—" she began, and then broke off. "Shall I help you with your packages?"

"If you like." He handed her two wrapped bottles. He himself took a much larger parcel, slid out of the car and held the door open for her. Then he snapped off the lights. In unfamiliar gloom they walked slowly around the big house to the roofless porch. Thunstone produced a key, and the lock whined protestingly at its turning. They entered thick darkness.

"What's that white thing?" gasped Sabine Loel, suddenly cowering back.

"A chair in a muslin cover," Thunstone reassured her, and groped his way to a table where he set down his package. Peering about, he made out a fireplace almost directly opposite. Crossing to it, he felt for and discovered logs and kindling. Rapidly he made a fire. It burned small for a moment, then strong and bright. The sleet began to rattle at the windows like hard, in-

sistent little fingertips demanding admittance.

The fire showed them a spacious room, occupying the whole width of the house's front. A door stood open at the rear, and to one side mounted a staircase. All was panelled in dark wood, and bookcases loomed bare, while the furniture was swaddled against dust.

To Thunstone's mind came, all unbidden, the lines of the ancient *Lyke-Wake Song*:

This æ nighte, this æ nighte,
Every nighte and alle,
Fire and sleete. . . .

The fire was doing well now, shedding its first cheerful heat. Sabine Loel moved gratefully toward it. The redness made her pallor seem more healthy. "I wonder where the treasure is," she ventured.

"Nobody seems to know about it, not even whether it exists or not," returned Thunstone. "The story is that some Revolutionary War looter hid it—a bad character, to judge from the implication of ghosts around it." From his parcel he dug a fat coach-candle and held a match to it. He set it in its own wax at the edge of the table.

. . . Fire and sleete and candle-lighte,
And Christe receive thy saule.

He had no desire to give up his soul this night, or for many nights to come; but the memory of the quaint old lines might be a good omen. Bishop Peter Binfel's witch-history, he reflected, points out that holy names are protection against ill magic.

"This is going to be cozy," said Sabine Loel, and dropped into the muslin-covered chair that had startled her. "Are you worrying? Remember old beliefs and stories?" And she laughed, as if in triumph that she had half-read his mind.

He smiled back at her, without any pique, and opened his package further. There were more candles, some paper napkins, sandwiches in oiled paper, fruit, and two glasses. Unwrapping one of the bottles, he skilfully forced its cork and poured out red wine.

"Supper?" he suggested, and Sabine Loel made a gay gesture of applause. He uncov-

ered two straight chairs and held one for her as she came to the table.

But she paused, in the very act of sitting down, paused with her knees half bent and her head lifted. It was as though she had frozen in mid-motion.

"Th-ther!" she wailed. "At the door!"

THUNSTONE could not see what she was talking about, for the candle glared in his eyes. He moved, lightning swift for all his size, around the table and to the door beyond—the inner door, that stood open to the rear of the house. All was black there, save for the wash of light that beat dimly past him.

"Don't leave me here alone," Sabine Loel was pleading, and he strode quickly back to the table, but only to seize and light another candle. Holding it high, he pushed into the rearward room. It was huge, musty, full of furniture. He saw another door, closed. As he touched the knob, he started. Something was moving softly up behind him.

"I was afraid to stay there by myself," Sabine Loel breathed in his ear. "Can't I come along?"

"Come," he granted shortly. He peered through the door he had opened. "Here's the kitchen, evidently. And there, to the right, a pantry. Now, then, for upstairs. Are you game?"

"I haven't told you yet," she half-chattered, "what it was I saw."

"No, I've not given you much time. Was it something human?"

"Yes. That is, it stood erect, as tall as a man, with a head and a long body." They had walked back into the front room together. "But it wasn't flesh. It was all misty, and I didn't see any limbs or features." She gulped and shivered.

"Well, it wasn't in the back of the house. Not downstairs, anyway. You want to come up?" And Thunstone started for the staircase.

She almost ran to keep up with him. "What if you meet it?"

"Come along and see." His feet were heavy but confident on the stairs. He held aloft the candle to illuminate a little cell of an upper hallway, from which opened several rooms.

"This," he pronounced, gazing into the

first, "is a bedroom. Look at that fine old walnut bureau. This next one is a bathroom. Fixtures archaic, but serviceable. Another bedroom here—and another. That's all. No phenomena to greet us. At least none that shows itself.

Sleet bombarded the slopes of the roof as they turned back down the stairs.

"You didn't pry too closely," observed Sabine Loel, and her voice was steady enough now. "Afraid of finding something?"

He shook his dark head. "If anything is afraid, it's whatever you saw. If you saw it."

IN SILENCE they descended. Thunstone poked the fire-logs with a long, heavy poker of wrought iron, and up sprang sparks and banners of flame. Again they went to the table, and this time there was no interruption. Sabine Loel took her seat facing the inner door, and Thunstone's broad back turned toward that dark rectangle, almost within clutching distance of it. He could not deny a feeling of apprehension, but his big hand was steady as it lifted his wine glass.

"A toast," said Sabine Loel, lifting hers in turn, and at least she spilled none. "I drink to—realities!"

"To realities," repeated Thunstone. "Sometimes they are stranger than fancies."

They drank, and Sabine Loel laughed quietly over the rim of her glass. But her shining eyes were fixed on the darkness behind her companion. He pretended not to notice.

When they had finished eating, and had emptied one of the bottles of wine, both returned to the fireplace. "It seems to be smoking," pointed out Sabine Loel.

"Perhaps the chimney's clogged," Thunstone again took the iron poker, and probed exploringly upward. A shower of soot descended, and he jumped quickly back to keep from being soiled. Not so Sabine Loel, who cried out in excitement, and snatched up something else that had fallen down, from a ledge within the fireplace.

"A little box—the treasure!" she exulted. "No, it's a book. A ledger, tied shut with cord, and dirty."

With a quick pull she broke the cord and opened the book. "Look, here on the first

page. The name of James Garrett, and some sort of warning: "This book is for my eyes alone." She turned a page. "Don't tell me that he was a psychical investigator, too!"

"Give it to me, please," said John Thunstone.

"I want to look through it," she murmured.

"Give it to me," he repeated. "I'm owner of this house, and it's best that I examine documents." He took it from her hand, not roughly, but without waiting for her to offer it. She stared, with a sort of bright hardness, and wiped her sooty fingers on a paper napkin.

"Will you pardon me?" asked Thunstone. He drew an armchair close to the fire. By its light he began to read the slovenly handwriting. What James Garrett had written began very ponderously:

I had best enter my thoughts and findings on paper. If this is not a record to impress others, it will at least give me calmness in the writing, perhaps strengthen me against follies of imagination.

They do me wrong who say I want to practice evil enchantments. It is only that I bought this old house, with its weird reputation; haunted, the countryside calls it, and haunted I believe it to be. It is also true that there is a hidden treasure in the cellar—a treasure that I will never let my kinsmen hunt for in their turn.

Thunstone's eyes widened a trifle. "That's why he left the place to me," he said aloud.

"May I take more wine," asked Sabine Loel, at the table. He nodded, and read on:

I have dug deep and its guard must know that I am close at hand. The least touch of my pick or spade brings him to drive me away. For I called him twice out of curiosity, and the third time . . .

Sabine Loel screamed loudly and wildly, and dropped her wine glass to shatter on the floor.

Thunstone had been leaning back in his chair, as relaxed and comfortable in seeming as a cat. But, like a cat, he was up and

out of the chair before one could well follow his movement. The book spun out of his lap and fell on the hearth. His hand caught up the heavy poker and brought it along.

SABINE LOEL faced toward the staircase. She did not turn toward him as he came to her side, but kept her eyes fixed on the darkness at the top. "It started to come down," she whispered hoarsely, and choked on the rest.

Thunstone seized one of the candles and went up the stairs again, two and three at a time. Sabine Loel remained by the table, leaning upon it with one slim, pale hand, her face a mask of expectant terror.

As Thunstone mounted into the upper hall he lifted his candle high, but for the moment it was as if the darkness muffled and enclosed that quivering little blade of light. He had to strain his eyes to see, though he had seen well enough the first time up. In spite of his steady native courage, he hesitated for ever so little. He forced himself to enter the nearest bedroom.

As he crossed the threshold, he thought that something crept to face him; but it was only a shadow, jumping as his candle-flame moved. All else was quiet in the close, cold air. He thought of a creepy witicism in a novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald: "If there's a ghost in the room, it's nearly always under the bed." That was the sense, if not the actual wording. Thunstone wished that all men were here who joked about supernatural dangers. Stooping, he thrust his poker under the bed. Something stirred—a cloud of dust.

Sneezing, he went to the other rooms in turn. Nothing moved in them but shadows, nothing spoke but the sleet on windows and roof. Yet, as he descended the steps once more, he felt weary.

Sabine Loel stood exactly as he had left her. She questioned him with her midnight eyes, and he shook his head. "I found nothing," he told her.

She smiled back, ruefully. "You must forgive me, Mr. Thunstone. I came here expecting things, I'm not sure just what. I may be mistaken in what I seem to see. But you did say that you believe in my psychic powers."

"I do believe in them," he assured her. "You haven't always used them wisely or honorably, but you have them."

He laid the poker on the table and stuck his candle beside its fellow. Then he went back to the fire. As he came close to the hearth, he stifled an exclamation.

The book in which James Garrett had written his secrets of treasure and terror was ablaze in the fire.

"How did that happen?" he cried, and quickly dragged it out with the toe of his shoe. Too late, he saw at once. The thing was consumed beyond restoration.

"What's the matter?" he heard Sabine Loel asking, but he was too busy to reply. Kneeling, he slapped out the fire in the book. Only a few bits of the inner leaves remained uncharred. He put together two of them, then a third, like bits of a puzzle. Part of a sentence became legible:

... terialized, it can do harm; but materialized, it can also be harmed itself. . . ."

He turned toward the hearth to look for more remains. As he did so, something seemed to explode in his head, and lightning and thunder filled the room. He collapsed forward, and did not see, hear or feel.

HIS wits returned slowly and cautiously, as to a place both dangerous and unfamiliar. The back of his head housed a red-hot throbbing, and his nose pressed against the warm stone of the hearth. He knew that he lay on the floor, face down, but for the moment he could not move, not even for the sense of peril hovering over him.

"Who hit me?" he mumbled thickly.

Sabine Loel did not answer, and he made shift to rise to his hands and one knee, shaking his head to clear it, like a groggy boxer. The dim room, distorted to his vision, was empty of her. As he straightened his body, something slid along it and fell with a startling clang—the stout iron poker, that had been lying across his back. Getting shakily to his feet, he shook his head again. It still hurt, but his strength was flowing back into him.

Sabine Loel's fur coat still hung draped across the back of the chair in which she had sat to eat and drink. One of the candles was gone from where it had stuck in its own wax. Thunstone tottered to the table, clutched it, and bent and gazed at the floor. A blob of candle-grease stuck to the planks, midway to the open door that led to the silent back of the house.

Thunstone shakily put out his big hand for the other candle, then thought better of it. The weakness was leaving his knees. After a moment he moved again, and this time with the strange, wise silence that his big but capable body could achieve. There was little light in the room to the rear, but enough for him to see that the kitchen door now stood open. He groped his way through it.

A great section of the kitchen floor had been lifted up and back, like a trapdoor. From beneath beat up a feeble, pale radiance. Thunstone settled on one knee at the edge of the open hole and peered down.

The cellar of Bertram Dower House was simply a great squared hole in the hard earth, walled by uncemented banks of rough soil. Crude, solid stairs, almost as steep as a ladder, led downward fully twelve feet. Thunstone lowered his still aching head until he could see well below the level of the floor, and gazed downward, in the direction of the front of the house.

From that direction blazed the light, the big candle that had been taken from the table. It was now stuck upon a rock or clod of earth on the cellar floor, and shed its yellow light into a cavelike hole in the frontward bank. Here stooped a human figure in a dark gown, toiling with a spade. Thunstone caught a momentary glimpse of the pale face, stamped with an almost murderous determination—the digger was Sabine Loel.

She knelt as he watched, and thrust one hand into the loosened soil. For the space of a breath she groped, then voiced a little cry of triumph. She lifted a palmful of gleaming stuff, yellower and brighter than the candle-light. It was gold.

Again she took up the spade and began delving, swiftly but shakily. Her head and shoulders pushed themselves deeply into the little cavern, just below a pair of graying

lumps on the lips of the bank. Thunstone, straining his eyes, could not decide what those lumps were.

But he saw them stir.

He bent lower, lying at full length on the floor. The candlewick in the cellar sent up a momentary flare of strong bluish light. It showed him that whole part of the cellar in brief radiance, and he identified the grayish objects.

They were a head and a hand, strangely shaped and indistinct but unmistakable. And they were moving, slowly and stealthily.

Thunstone's lips opened, but no sound came out. The smaller lump, the hand, crawled deliberately over the lip of the bank and down the face of earth, above Sabine Loel's stooped, straining shoulders. It was somehow only half-formed, a rounded cobble of some foggy substance, and its arm was reed-thin and jointless. The effect was of a strange gray spider with thick, short legs, descending on a preternaturally stout strand of web. The hand opened, the fingers quivered, like the spider-limbs clutching for prey.

They touched Sabine Loel's neck. And she looked up, and shrieked with a wild, trapped terror.

John Thunstone rolled himself into the opening, his hands holding the brink to break his fall. He spun in the air, dropped several feet and landed upright on soggy earth.

His nostrils suddenly filled with a damp mouldy smell, and the shock of his heavy descent made the blue candle-flame quiver. All these little details he noted, even as he rushed.

The rest of what had been on the dark bank above Sabine was coming down. It flowed swiftly and unsubstantially, like a heavy cloud of greasy-gray vapor settling through lighter atmosphere. Beneath it, Sabine Loel was collapsing, but whether in a faint or under the weight of the thing Thunstone could not take time to decide. Three plunging leaps took him across the earthy floor.

The creature faced him, rising to his own height, and higher.

It was like a grotesque body moulded of thick, opaque steam or smoke, its

substance churning and whirling within strange, sharp confines. Its head, set on top without benefit of neck or shoulders, looked to be without a cranium as well—it had great, gross lips and jaws, and pointed bat-ears jutted from it, but there were no eyes or brow that he could see. Hands, at the ends of scrawny, jointless arms, lifted toward him, as though they were trying to fumble at his throat. Thunstone had a sense as at the presence of an unthinkable, revolting foulness; but he did not retreat or falter. His big right fist sped straight at the head-blob.

No impact, only a swirling and sucking inward of the vapors. The whole body-form drifted backward, like smoke before the swing of a fan. It hung like a smudge against the bank, and there he saw that it thickened, immediately and considerably, to a slimy wetness. It was no more like moulded vapor, but like a dank daub upon the earthen face, a foul stagnant pool set upon an end. And it moved back toward him.

Its hands came up gropingly as before, to the level of his face.

HE felt a moist flick, as if wind had blown a hit of stinking spray upon his cheek. Despite all his determination, he broke ground before the advancing filthiness. As he did so, he almost stumbled backward over the crumpled form of Sabine Loel. Stooping quickly, he scooped her up under one arm and dragged her back with him toward the ladderlike stairs. His eyes did not falter from the presence that slowly pursued.

It had changed yet again. Now it was no longer liquid, but solid.

Still it presented the ungainly gargoyle outline it had first shown, degenerate head upon misshapen body, with gross hands upon reed-like arms. But it had gained substance, as much substance as John Thunstone's own big frame had. Details were now sickeningly clear. Its loose slab lips twitched and gaped open, showing a toothless mouth full of the blackest shadow. Its big hands hooked their fingers like grapnels. They bore claws at their tips, claws as black as crystallized vegetable decay.

To his wire-tense mind came a sudden blessed memory, the memory of that sur-

viving scrap of James Garrett's burned ledger:

"... materialized, it can do harm, but, materialized, it can also be harmed itself. . . ."

He let go of the slack form of Sabine Loel, and as she sank to the earthen floor, still swooning, he stepped in front of her. Had her eyes been open, she would have seen Thunstone's face grow suddenly bright and purposeful, his lips drawn taut beneath his dark moustache. His wide shoulders hunched themselves, as if power greatened within him. For a third time he set himself in the way of the entity's advance.

Yet again the hands stole toward him. His left arm was extended, pugilist fashion, and the hands found it and closed upon it. He felt those claws of hard rock as they pierced his coat-sleeve, but he did not try to pull or struggle loose. Shifting his stance, he drove his right arm with all the strength he could put back of it, powerfully and scientifically, at that working, grimacing mouth.

His knuckles pulped the blub lips over something hard—the thing must have teeth after all, chalk-textured rather than bony. The witless-looking head snapped back from his blow like a batted ball, carrying with it the body, the arms, the hands. Cloth ripped as the talons tore from their hold on Thunstone's sleeve, and with his freed left fist Thunstone sped a long, clean jab. From somewhere a moan drifted up, the thing could feel pain. Thunstone stepped in, crouching low. The talons, missing a grab at his neck, scrambled clumsily in his disordered dark hair. He dug his right fist, then his left, into the spongy-seeming middle of the body. Then his right fist cut upward to where normal beings have a chin.

There was a sudden floundering fall before him, and there rose at him two flourishing, kicking extremities that he could not call feet.

HE LAUNCHED a kick himself, and wondered half-foolishly if the torso he struck had ribs to break. Again he kicked and shoved, and the misshapen form tried to roll clear, to get up. He kept after it,

hooking a toe behind a hand on which it was rising and dragging it into another sprawl. A third kick hefted its slack, squirming weight bodily into the hallowed-out cavern where Sabine Loel had toiled.

There his enemy seemed to recover itself. Shrinking clear of him, it struggled to rise. But Thunstone had caught up the fallen spade and poised it for a downward sweep.

Though there were no eyes or excuses for eyes in that gray face, the creature knew danger and cowered back. Candlelight, strongest here, showed it suddenly wet like filthy snow in the sun—it was dissolving into flowing liquid again, hoping to trickle away to escape, reorganization, new attack.

Thunstone struck with his shovel, not into the hole but above it.

A shower of clods fell from the walls and roof of the depression, momentarily overwhelming the form inside. It was already half-melted into dampness, and into that dampness fell earth and muck, mingling and disorganizing. Thunstone struck again and again at the earth above and around it, piling shovelfuls of clods as into a grave.

"What—what—"

It was the voice of Sabine Loel. The noise of the struggle must have roused her. She was on her feet, moving close. Her pale, handsome face showed no terror, only mystification and some embarrassment. Plainly she only half remembered what had frightened her, literally, out of her wits.

Thunstone paid no attention, but hurtled still more earth into the cave, and more. Some black dampness seeped through for a moment, and he flung a fresh spadeful upon it. Then he paused.

"Let it finish its change now," he said, when he caught his breath. "Even if it's vapor again, this dirt will confine it tonight. Tomorrow I'll be back with workmen and cement mixers. This cellar shall be filled to the brim with concrete—marked with protecting symbols—"

Sabine Loel was at his side. Now she was remembering. Her eyes flickered in horror. She held out a trembling right hand, in which she still clutched half a dozen broad pieces of gold.

"I found these—" she began.

Roughly, Thunstone snatched them from her and flung them into the pit. He shoveled

more dirt upon them. She cried out in protest, a hand at her brow from which sprouted the waving gray lock of hair.

"You can testify now to the meaning of tainted money," Thunstone told her flatly. "The treasure and its guardian seem to go together. It threatened James Garrett, it threatens us. Some would be trite and call the gold accursed. I call it unprofitable." Once again he threw in earth. "Let the thing stay shut up here, and its gold with it."

"But there's a fortune," protested Sabine Loel frantically. "I'd touched only the top. There's enough to—"

"It was left to me, by the will of James Garrett." Thunstone toiled on without easing. "I half-guessed that something like this would happen. You, with your power and your deceit, were exactly what was needed to tempt the thing forth, so that it could be defeated and hereafter kept out of reckoning. As I construct it, you read James Garrett's ledger while I was upstairs alone."

"Why," she stammered in confusion, "why—"

He smiled as he dug his spade into fresh earth. "I'll hazard a guess. I'd paid you to hunt spirits, so you began by pretending—only pretending—to see something as we sat down to eat."

SHE did not deny it, but lowered her head.

"That was only mischief on your part," he went on. "Then, when I found the book in the chimney, you pretended again to see something on the stairs. That was to start me on another chase, so that you'd have a chance to read. You quickly skimmed through what Garrett had written about where the treasure was to be dug for. To keep me from seeing it too, you threw the book into the fire. Isn't that true?"

Still she kept guilty silence. Thunstone smiled more broadly, completely without malice.

"And you hit me on the head with the poker, eh? Thought to get the money while I lay unconscious. But I woke up sooner than you thought, just in time to save you from what you had summoned."

"It!" she cried, finding her voice at last. "I summoned it!"

"You were too greedy to remember what James Garrett wrote in his book, and on the margin of the copy of the will sent to me. 'Call him twice, and the third time he comes uncalled.' That's exactly what you did. Twice you pretended to see something terrible, to deceive me. The third time, there was no deception. The guardian of the treasure rose to deal with you."

Sabine Loel's face was white, but calm. "Listen," she pleaded. "Be sensible. There is too much money here to let lie."

"No," he replied, "there is not too much money here to let lie." Stooping, he gazed at his heap of earth. Above it hung a swirl of grayish vapor, no larger than the upward waft of a cigarette's smoke. He patted the place with the bottom of the spade, and the vapor vanished.

"We could both be rich," Sabine Loel persisted. "We can come and dig tomorrow, by daylight. We could bring crucifixes, priests, any protection you want."

"We'll never dig for it," he said.

"We must," she fairly sobbed. Her white hand caught his sleeve, the same sleeve that had been torn by filthy talons. "Listen, I say. You admit I'm attractive—well, I'll be yours. I'll spend my life making you happy beyond any dream. I can do that. You'll have both the gold and me."

He did not answer, did not even look at her.

She brought her beautiful white mask of a face close to his, fixing his eyes with hers. "Am I so easy for a man to refuse?" she murmured softly.

"No," said John Thunstone honestly. "You are by no means easy for a man to refuse. But I refuse you. I'll fill this hole tonight. Tomorrow it'll be sealed so that only dynamite will ever open it. Of course, if you feel that you can't live without the treasure, I'll go away now. You may remain alone, with the spade and the candle, and dig up everything I've buried."

Sabine Loel drew back, and bowed her head again. This time she was accepting defeat.

John Thunstone resumed his shoveling.

"THE SHADOW FOLK" by EDMOND HAMILTON

SEPTEMBER

Weird Tales

15¢

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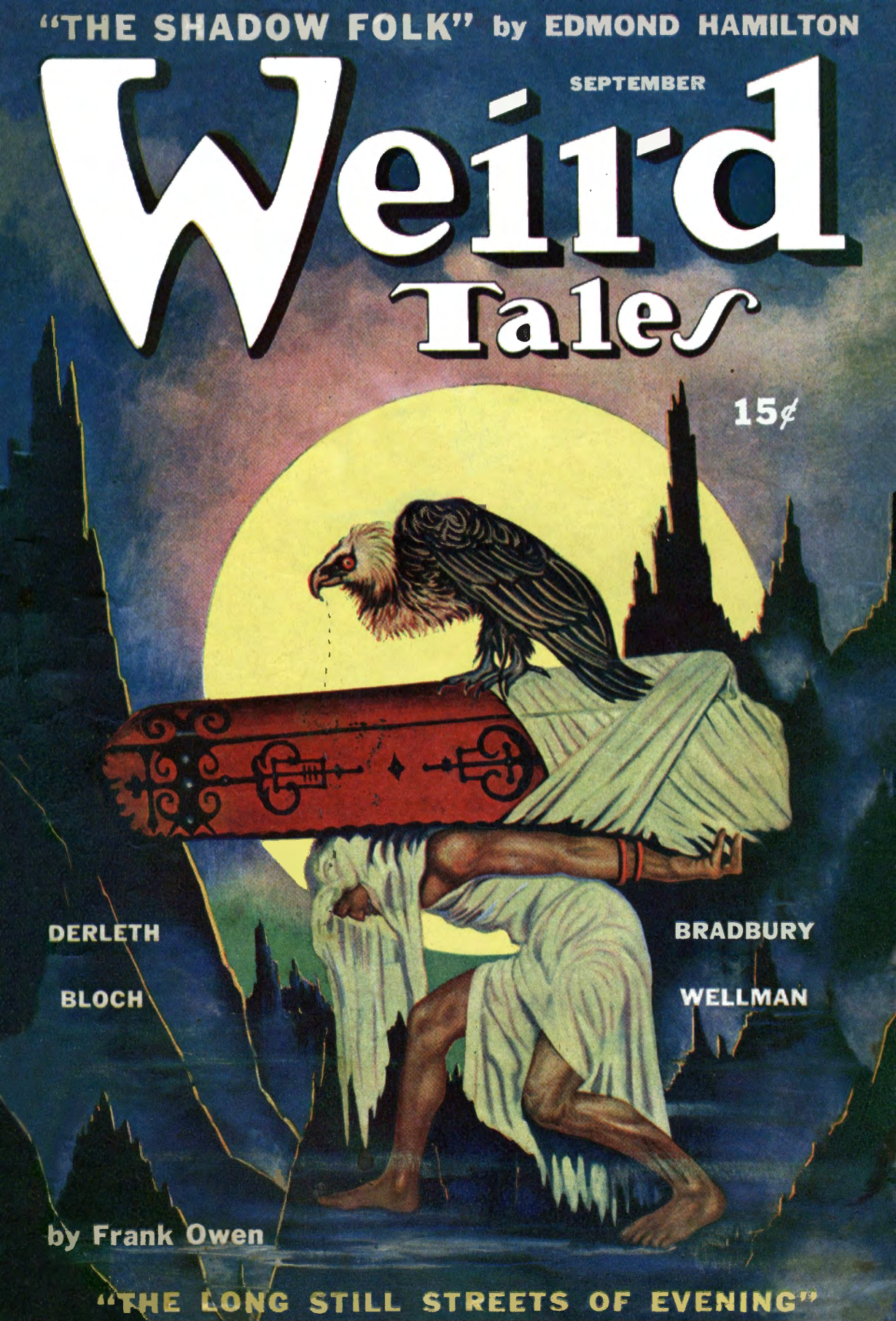
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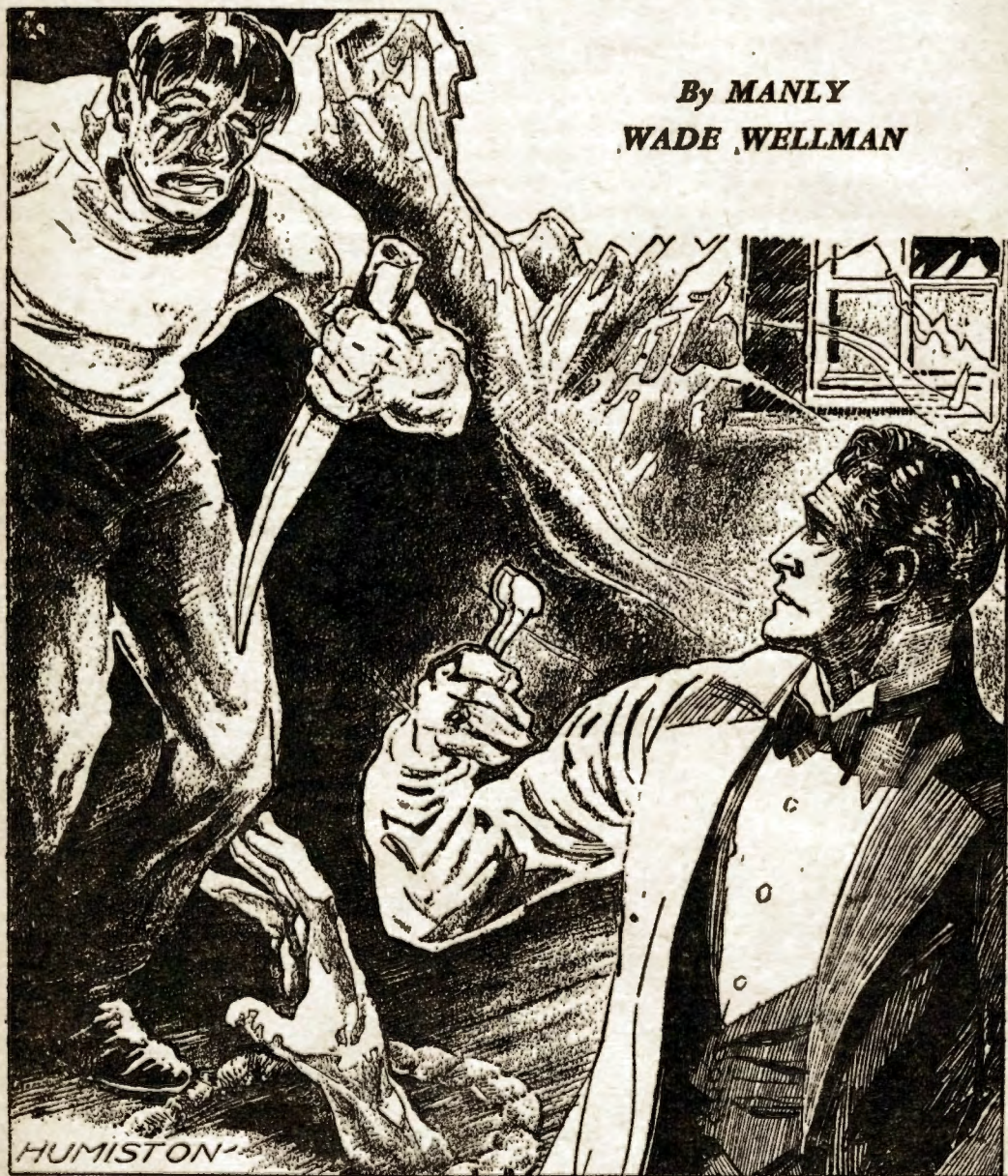
by Frank Owen

"THE LONG STILL STREETS OF EVENING"



Sorcery from Thule

By **MANLY
WADE WELLMAN**



*Bad magic is the province of the issinioks—they who turn themselves
into animals and kill from a distance*

*Jon. You tremble—with Arctic cold?
Thorwald. With Arctic fear.*

—**POG ABROSTO**, *The Baresarks*.
(Trans. by Leon Minshall)

JOHN THUNSTONE'S dinner guest was not the most remarkable person he had ever entertained in public, but almost. John Thunstone introduced him to the

Heading by **FRED HUMISTON**

Countess Montesecco, to Verna Hesseldine and to the head waiter of Whiteside's as Mr. Ipsu, and Mr. Ipsu acknowledged all courtesies in a quiet voice, with an accent not immediately classifiable, even in Times Square. He was of medium height and slender build, so that he seemed a child beside the massive Thunstone. His dinner clothes had surely been tailored in Europe. His face was square and pleasant and the color of a well-roasted fowl, so that his white teeth seemed whiter by contrast. His narrow, bright-black eyes had an almost hypnotic directness. One decided that he might be Levantine, or Polynesian, or Punjabi; then decided that he was none of the three.

They had a cocktail before dinner, at a table not too far from the music, and Mr. Ipsu dispelled the mystery. "By vocation I am a sort of religious leader," he told the ladies. "By inclination, I am a student. By race, I am an Eskimo."

"The first I ever met," announced Verna Hesseldine, who had met most classes and peoples apt to turn up at Whiteside's. "Do you like New York, Mr. Ipsu?"

The black eyes and the white teeth smiled. Ipsu looked at Thunstone, who was telling the waiter how he wanted the soup seasoned, then at the Countess, and back at Miss Hesseldine. "Ask me that in thirty years. I don't know now."

"You never dreamed of such a place in Greenland," she suggested.

"No, though I've not lived always in Greenland. I attended the university at Copenhagen, and studied later at Stockholm and Edinburgh. I've acted in two motion pictures, and lectured to women's clubs in Los Angeles and Montreal and Chicago. All this as part of the study of the world that I felt a good *angekok* should make."

"*Angekok*," repeated the Countess uncertainly. Mr. Ipsu smiled.

"Every Eskimo community has an *angekok*, and white explorers call him a magician, a medicine man, a priest, a soothsayer, a fourflusher—a variety of things." The smile became apologetic. "I can't translate the term myself. But *angekoks* are necessary. Arctic life is so hard as to be almost impossible, yet Eskimos have lived and flourished and developed their own culture since the beginning of time. I venture to say that we *angekoks* help to make their lives livable."

"How?" asked Miss Hesseldine. "Magic?" She turned to Thunstone. "John, I know you study and do amazing things, but do you believe—"

"Dear lady," broke in Ipsu gently, "I claim nothing, I only wonder and work. My people must have guidance in hunting, in travel, in a hundred labors and adventures against the cold and the snow. They ask me what happens ten days' journey away, or a week in the future, and I try to oblige. I turn out right more often than not. Or there is sickness or peril. I enter the *quaggi*—the singing-house, you might call it, though we do more there than sing. I do and say and think certain formulas. Perhaps I succeed."

A little silence. The waiter brought hors d'oeuvres.

"Excuse me if I say the wrong thing," ventured Verna Hesseldine, "but how can an educated and travelled man seriously say—"

She paused, and Mr. Ipsu smiled again.

"Dear lady, I was bred and seasoned in my faith, as you in yours. The nature of reality is my whole goal of search, and I have only begun. On the shores of the ocean of knowledge, I gather a few pebbles, but they have substance and shape and reality."

"You must be a worthwhile person, Mr. Ipsu," said Miss Hesseldine. John here studies magic and the supernatural, and he wouldn't consort with you if you were a bad—what is the word again?—if you were a bad *angekok*."

"Oh," and he took some spiced sausage, "the very term *angekok* means good magic. If we fail to do good, it's only because we bungle. Bad magic," and he grew somber, "is the province of the *issintoks*."

"Are they powerful, as the *angekoks* are?" asked the Countess.

"They are powerful in a different way. They consort with bad spirits—even Sedna, who rules the Night Land. They turn themselves into strange, unpleasant animals. They kill from a distance, by words I would never, never say."

THEN he smiled and made a deprecatory gesture. "But this is boresome, ladies. I speak of savage superstitions, and of my stupid, clumsy self. I am ashamed to show such poor manners."

"Oh, we want to hear," protested both women, but Ipsu shook his gleaming black head.

"That you consent to sit with me is more than honor enough. I come from a stone-age people. The things I speak about are too ridiculous to interest you. Please," he said to John Thunstone, "ask them to forgive me."

Verna Hesseldine coughed. "If I've offended you, I'm sorry."

"Offend me?" repeated Ipsu. "I would not presume to be offended. I know that I have fatigued you with my drivel about Eskimo myths."

Thunstone understood. Ipsu, like all well-bred Eskimo gentlemen, was being formally modest and abasing himself. He had been taught that conceit was worse than torture or death. Thunstone tried to approach the little crisis.

"Ipsu," he said, "I haven't been to your country, but I've read the books—Freuchen, Dr. Kane, and the others—who went there and who had the sense to observe your customs. Remember that you're in my land now. Do as the Romans do."

Ipsu brightened. "If you truly want to hear—"

"We do," Verna Hesseldine assured him eagerly. "Tell us about the *issintoks*, the evil sorcerers."

"This far from where they work, I may speak," began Ipsu, and once again broke off.

His mouth hung open, then closed with a sudden grinding of teeth. His eyes started, his hand flew to the front of his dinner jacket and came away with blood on the fingers.

"You're hurt!" cried the Countess.

Thunstone was on his feet. The waiter hurried forward, goggling.

"Accident," said Thunstone. "Where may I take my friend?"

The waiter led him to the lounge. Ipsu staggered as he tried to follow, and Thunstone lifted him like a kitten, hurrying him along. Laying Ipsu on a couch, he pulled open the coat and shirt.

Ipsu's brown skin was gashed, just to the left of the breastbone. Recovering a bit, he studied the place. "There is one here," he said shakily. "John, that was done by—"

The manager of Whiteside's was tele-

phoning for a doctor. Thunstone took a clean napkin from the waiter, and wadded it into a compress.

"By rights," said Ipsu, "I should be dead. Look in my waistcoat pocket, on the left side."

Thunstone drew a flat cigarette case of silver from Ipsu's pocket. At its center appeared a jagged hole, as if a hard, rough point had been jammed through it. Ipsu studied it.

"The *issintok* spear." His voice had grown stronger. "Driven for the heart, but blocked away. Isn't your temperate-zone magic full of references to silver as a protection? Please ask the ladies to excuse us. I was wrong to be coy. I must tell you much about *angekok* and *issintok* and the battle between them—battle which now opens on the New York front."

WHEN the doctor came, he spoke about slight flesh wounds and nervous shocks, and went away puzzled. Later, lying on the cot in his little hotel room, Ipsu talked.

"I need not persuade you how well enchantments work, John. An *angekok* might use the spell to kill remote game for his hungry brothers, but an *issintok* uses it against human enemies. It calls for preparation by fasting and chanting, then prayer to spirits of good or evil, according to the good or evil of the wish. Finally, rushing to the door of the *quaggi*, you strike out into the night with a certain spear, of peculiar name and history. It comes back covered with hot blood. The stricken beast or man is later found stabbed to the heart, unless, of course—" He picked up the damaged silver case, and regarded it gratefully.

"Why should it be less possible that radio devices that show the position of a far-off ship, which is then smashed by shells fired from beyond the horizon?" said Thunstone. "But who, Ipsu? Who would want to kill you, and who would know how?"

"The only *issintok* whom I ever challenged," said Ipsu slowly, "lived far north of Etah in Greenland. He and I had a contest of magic. It would have interested you, I think. When he was shown to be the weaker for that time, his followers turned on him and drove him from the tribe. . . . Wait!" Ipsu sat up. "He is an exile. Perhaps far from Greenland. He, too, had studied

among civilized peoples—can it be that he has come here?"

"What was his name? Would the police be interested?"

"His name was Kumak. If he continued as he began, police would want him badly. But do me a favor by leaving this to me."

Thunstone bowed his head in agreement. Ipsu swung his feet to the floor and slid them into shoes. He buttoned a fresh shirt over his bandaged chest. "Kumak," he said again. "He knew how to find me, and I shall know how to find him." He pointed to the corner of the room. "My side is sore. Will you lift the small suitcase to the bureau-top? And open it?"

It was done. Ipsu took from the suitcase a small roundish parcel, the size of his fist. Carefully he unwrapped it and revealed a pitted stone, like a lump of slag from a furnace, then laid it carefully on a table.

Thunstone stooped to examine. "Meteorite."

"Do not touch it. A *tornaq*—a rock-spirit lives there."

"I've read of the belief. Aren't the strongest of the *tornait* in big boulders?"

"Those with small homes may be the shrewder because of their smallness," replied Ipsu sententiously. He took something else from his case, a carved bone that Thunstone could not identify as being either human or from any animal he knew. This Ipsu laid beside the meteorite, and looked at Thunstone.

"If you stay to listen, please do not move or speak. Sit yonder in the corner." Ipsu dropped into a chair before the table, and drew his feet up under him, Eskimo fashion. Softly he began to sing, a minor tune reminiscent of old, old Chinese flute-music:

"*Amna-aya! Amna-aya!*"

Thunstone, watching from where he sat, saw a shadowy movement. The little meteorite had stirred, was sliding or turning. It rolled slowly over, as if impelled by an invisible lever. It joggled the bone toward Ipsu's hand, and he took it up.

"The *tornaq* empowers the bone," he said to Thunstone. "It will guide me. If you wish to come—"

Thunstone's car was parked outside. As they drove, Ipsu held the bone between his brown palms, and it twitched once or twice, like the willow rod with which dowsers

claim to find hidden water or gold. They drove across town. "*Ja mua*," muttered Ipsu. "Turn to the right." Several blocks toward lower Manhattan, and: *Ana*—right again. The little brown shop front there ahead. *Obaba*—stop!"

ON THE door was a sign proclaiming the building to be a zoological laboratory. They entered a dim, old-fashioned room like a shop, where a gray-haired man in a smock was wrapping up something. The customer who waited was as brown as Ipsu, but heavy and coarse-featured. To Thunstone he looked somehow like unfinished handiwork. Whatever creator had fashioned him should have spent another hour or so at it. . . .

"Kumak," Ipsu greeted softly, and the fat face turned toward them. Slant, narrow eyes glowed in recognition.

"You know me, Ipsu," ventured the man, bowing jerkily. "I am flattered that a decent person speaks to me."

Ipsu, too, bowed, like a mandarin. "It is you, Kumak, who lower yourself by recognizing me. His eyes were calculating. "You have been living in New York? You are a friend of New Yorkers?"

"Oh," protested Kumak, "nobody notices me. I am so ugly and low that no sensible man would give me his attention. You are the first to grant me a word in many days."

Kumak's eyes shifted to Thunstone. Ipsu made a gesture of introduction. "My friend, though I am not worthy to call him that. John Thunstone."

"You have named him only to make a fool of me," complained Kumak, fidgeting. "I am so stupid and poorly brought up that I have never learned to speak. I am contemptible before this great American." He studied Thunstone more closely, as if wondering where a weapon might strike. The man in the smock offered the package, and Kumak gave him money.

"Where do you live, Kumak?" asked Ipsu.

Kumak shook his head. "You know I do not dare tell a great *angekok* my wretched dwelling. It is the filthiest and most uncomfortable room in New York. Even to speak the address would be to give offense." Kumak bowed once more, and shuffled out.

Thunstone had listened in utter fascination. This was Eskimo formality, the ritual-

istic humility that constituted polite discourse in the Arctic wilds. If it was ever so slightly more extravagant than usual, that meant that the two were being extra alert, extra cautious of each other. Ipsu was staring after Kumak. Thunstone turned to the proprietor.

"What did he buy from you?"

The man stared, a little hostile, and from his pocket Thunstone drew a small shiny badge.

"Police?" asked the man.

"Of a sort. What did he buy?"

"Venom. Snake venom." A lean old finger pointed to a wire cage on a shelf, where dozed a great coiled rattlesnake. "He had an introduction from someone at the university—"

"Come with me," said Thunstone to Ipsu, "and talk. It seems as if your *issintok* friend will make a new try with the spear that didn't kill you."

They went back to the car.

"Poison, in the slightest of wounds, should succeed," said Thunstone.

"Succeed against us both," nodded Ipsu. Kumak knows that you are with me in the matter, John. You will be attacked, too—perhaps first, perhaps second. Quick, back to the room. We must do more magic of our own, and do it first."

AT IPSU'S quarters, the two went quickly to work, pushing all furniture to the walls. Ipsu produced a little soapstone lamp, full of hard-congealed fat. Turning out the electric lights, he kindled the crudely twisted wick of dried moss. A dim glow, pale-brown in color, flickered up, casting strange shadows.

"This room must serve as our *quaggi*," he announced. "Sit opposite me on the floor."

Squatting, Ipsu held up something else, a piece of dry, untanned sealskin. It gave out a whisper of crackly sound. "Shake this in rhythm for me. I must call a spirit—a strong spirit—"

"A good spirit, of course?"

"I hope it is a good one," replied Ipsu cryptically, and thrust the patch of skin into Thunstone's hand.

Thunstone began to shake it. It rustled gently, like marching feet in distant dead grass. The light began to die down, grad-

ually and steadily, and finally winked out, as if a thumb and finger had pinched the flame from the wick. The last flicker showed Ipsu, squatting on his heels with knees on the floor, arms extended and hands tight clasped, face raised a little.

From somewhere rose a vibrating cry, deep and musical, like the blast of a bass horn. It changed to a wheezing, hissing note. Still shaking the skin in rhythm as Ipsu had directed, Thunstone experimentally held the breath that was in his own great lungs. He kept it stubbornly pent up until his head swam and his eyes stung. At last he breathed out because he must, and at once gulped fresh air and held it until he was forced to breathe a second time. Not once in that time did the prolonged hiss break off, or even quaver. It seemed long minutes before it went silent.

"Stop now," said a voice in the darkness that must be Ipsu's. "Full silence."

The dim-seen squatting figure opposite Thunstone collapsed where it was, lying on the floor like a corpse.

Thunstone laid down the rustling skin. Carefully, silently, he leaned forward to touch Ipsu's outflung arm.

Ipsu's wrist was slack and chill. Thunstone could feel no pulse. When he let go the wrist, it fell like a clod to the boards. Thunstone bent closer, feeling for Ipsu's heart. It, too, did not stir.

The *angekok*, then, had died. Kumak's magic—what else?—had stricken him in the very midst of his defense conjuration.

Thunstone got to his feet. His groping hand found the table against the wall, and his fingers touched something—the carved bone that Ipsu had used as a guide to Kumak. Thunstone picked it up. It was as warm as a living thing, and seemed to quiver between his great fingers. Thunstone remembered what Ipsu had said of the *tornaq*, the rock-spirit. Would it lead again to the enemy? As if in response to his thought, the bone stirred more strongly in his grasp.

Thunstone tiptoed to the door and went out, hatless and coatless. He did not look back at the limp, quiet form of his prostrate friend. Downstairs he got into his car. With one hand he started the motor, shifted gears, and with one hand he steered away from the curb. The bone, close held in his other hand,

made a little throbbing leap to the right. Obediently Thunstone turned at the next corner, turned again when the bone indicated a change of direction.

He rolled past the laboratory where Kumak had bought snake venom. It was two blocks further on that the bone seemed to press backward against his palm, and he braked to a halt. As he got out, he felt his guide tugging toward a doorway between two flights of stone steps.

Kumak must live there. Kumak had killed Ipsu, would kill others. Kumak had best die himself. Thunstone, who from time to time had done considerable killing of his own and always with the clearest of conscience, put the bone in his vest pocket. His broad, heavy shoulders hunched, as if ready to put power back of a blow.

THE lock of the door was simple and old. The first of the skeleton keys on the bunch Thunstone carried opened the door. Inside was a narrow, shabby hallway, with a row of doors on each side. The door-jambs bore cards, lettered in pen and ink. He looked at the names in turn. Travers. Lorenzen. McCoy. Kumak.

His fingers touched the brass knob, and it was icy cold.

He paused a moment, even then, to ponder the connection between thoughts of evil and thoughts of the Arctic. Lovecraft, who wrote and thought as no other man about supernatural horror, was forever commenting upon the chill, physical and spiritual, of wickedness and baleful mystery. The ancients had believed in whole nations of warlocks to the far north—Thule and Hyperborea. Iceland and Lapland had been synonyms for magic. Where did one find the baleful lycanthrope most plentiful? In frozen Siberia. Why do natives dare not scale the snowy crests of the Himalayas? For fear of the abominable ice-demons. Death's hand is icy. The Norseman's inferno is a place of utter dark and sleet.

He opened the door.

Kumak had spoken truth when he said that his living quarters were wretched. The little cube of a room was painted in sad, rusty colors. The carpetless floorboards were worn and uneven. Like Ipsu's hotel chamber, it had been lighted by a stone lamp from the Arctic, now burning low. In the

center of the floor lay a coiled ring of raw-hide rope—that would be the mystic doing of the *issintok*, the opening into the world of spirits. And the spear with which death could be dealt afar was now in Kumak's hand.

Kumak, stripped to his undershirt and trousers, looked shiny with sweat. He held the weapon with its butt on the floor and its point upward, at a level with his pudgy shoulder. The spear-haft was of dark, well-seasoned wood, and the head was a full foot in length, pale yellow in color, fluted and twisted to the tapering point. Thunstone knew what it was. The ancients would take it for the horn of a unicorn, capable of any magic. In reality it was the ivory tusk of a norwahl.

From a small bottle Kumak was anointing the tip. He sang to himself, softly and tremulously, a song of Eskimo enchantment. Then his magic was not complete. Why had Ipsu died?

"Kumak," said Thunstone.

KUMAK looked up. His eyes were no longer narrow, but bulged and stared. They were full of green lights, like the eyes of a meat-eating animal.

"You think I cannot kill him," muttered Kumak. "The shadows from Sedna ripen. He shall die. But you—you die first."

He faced Thunstone and poised the spear for a throw or a stab. His ungainly body seemed to take on a dangerous grace, the grace of the trained hunter who knows the gear with which he deals death. A drop of moisture on the ivory tip gleamed in the moonlight. That would be the rattlesnake venom. A scratch would be enough to kill. Thunstone set himself to repel any rush.

"You die first," repeated Kumak. "Then Ipsu, when the shadows lead my thrust to his heart."

He moved a step forward. His foot planted itself close to the coil of cord upon the floor.

Then it was that Thunstone saw a bit of movement on the cord. It seemed that a knot, a large knot, tied itself among the strands; a knot that was strangely intricate, and seemed to tighten steadily. It was a brown knot and tense, shaped like a fist.

No, not like a fist. For it was a fist.

A brown hand had come up from within.

the coil and was clinging there, as to the rim of a manhole.

"I shall kill you," promised Kumak. "I shall thrust you through the heart, then through the arms and legs, so that you cannot walk or hunt in the Spirit Country. And with this spear I shall slash the skin from your brow over your eyes, so that your spirit cannot see."

The hand rose, and after it an arm. It caught Kumak by the ankle, and twitched him from his feet.

Kumak opened his writhing mouth and would have howled, but what whipped out of the circle of rope was too quick for him. Another hand was on his mouth, a sinewy brown body, stark naked, flung itself upon him to hold him down. There was a struggle for the spear.

Thunstone stood where he was, and watched. The naked brown attacker was blurred at the edges of its silhouette, like the memory of an acquaintance. The memory of Ipsu.

THE two grapplers struggled to their feet. The spear was between them, but with a sudden effort the Ipsu-thing wrenched it away. There came a darting stroke, the abrupt, heavy sound of a blow striking deep into flesh. Ipsu's image stepped back.

Kumak stood wavering. The haft of the spear jutted from his panting chest. The norwahl tusk, no longer ivory-pale but red, stood out between his shoulders. He thudded down on his face. Ipsu's dark eyes and white teeth flashed a smile at Thunstone. Then the naked figure slipped, feet first and swifter than a diving seal, back into the ring of cord. It sank from sight.

Thunstone stepped across to look. Within the rawhide circle there was only floor, bare and solid. He turned, strode across the still twitching body of Kumak, and departed the way he had come.

Back at the hotel he had something else to stare at.

The electric light was turned on in Ipsu's room, the furniture pulled back into place, and all the properties of Eskimo magic stowed out of sight. On the bureau stood a tray of sandwiches and a pot of coffee from the grill downstairs. Ipsu sat in his shirt sleeves on the edge of the cot, biting hungrily into bread and meat. He smiled

again at Thunstone, as the entity in Kumak's room had smiled.

"I believe you expected to find me dead," he greeted his friend.

"You were dead," replied Thunstone. "I touched your body, and there was no pulse nor heart beat."

"I was only sleeping very soundly," explained Ipsu. "A trance—any one of several hundred New York mediums can go into one. Will you have a sandwich? Next you'll claim that you saw my disembodied spirit in Kumak's room."

"Indeed I did see it," Thunstone assured him. "I thought—"

"That my ghost was taking vengeance? It was. But I had not died. I simply left my body for a short time and went to do what must be done. Since Kumak had made his rope-coil—the doorway to the Spirit Country—it was doubly easy to reach him. Don't stare, John. *Angekoks* can do these things."

Thunstone sat down and drew in his breath. He was perspiring.

"I might expect strange things from Eskimo magic," he said at last. "Night, when magic is strongest, lasts six months at a time up near the pole."

"Yet six months is only half of the year," reminded Ipsu, pouring coffee. "Snow—clean, white snow—is there forever. White is more lasting and more universal than black in the Eskimo land. Therefore magic of good can be stronger than magic of evil."

Thunstone shook his head. "What I have seen is so strange, even to me—"

"But what did you see?" Ipsu demanded. "Don't you think it was only your imagination? You rate me too highly. I am no real *angekok*. I am not capable of using the wisdom of my people."

"No more of your Eskimo false modesty," begged Thunstone. "I don't think I can endure it just now."

"Just hokus-pokus and trickery, and maybe some self-induced hypnotism in us and in Kumak," went on Ipsu stubbornly. "John, you ascribe intelligence and courage to me, and I have none of either. I am only the most stupid and ugly of my people, on whom you take pity. Shall we talk of something that is fit to interest grown men?"

Again he offered the sandwiches. And winked.

"THE BAT IS MY BROTHER" by ROBERT BLOCH

NOVEMBER

Weird Tales

15¢



**August
Derleth**

**Manly
Wellman**

**Ray
Bradbury**

**Thorp
McClusky**

The Dead Man's Hand



By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Now open lock To the Dead Man's knock!
Fly bar and bolt and band!
Nor move nor swerve Joint, muscle or nerve
To the spell of the Dead Man's Hand!
Sleep, all who sleep!—Wake, all who wake!
But be as the Dead for the Dead Man's sake!
—Thomas Ingoldsby, "The Hand of Glory."

THE men in front of the store were all laughing in the sunset, but not one of them sounded cheerful.

"Y'hear this, Sam?" someone asked a latecomer. "Stranger askin' the way to Old

Monroe's. Must be the one who bought the place."

More laughter, in which the latecomer joined. Berna's father turned grim and dangerous enough to counterbalance all their mockery. He was hard and gaunt in his seersucker suit, with a long nose, a long chin, and a foxtrap mouth between them.

"I know the joke," he said, leaning over his steering wheel. "You think the place is haunted."

"No," cackled a dried little gaffer on an upturned nail-keg. "Haunted ain't the word.

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

*The Shonokins took this country from creatures too terrible to imagine—
they themselves are none less evil*

Curst, more like it. Me, I ain't got many more nights to live, and I wouldn't spend none of 'em at Old Monroe's."

"I know all about that silly story," announced Berna's father.

"All?" teased someone else. "Silly story?"

"And I'm thankful it's so well believed. That's how I was able to buy the farm so cheap."

"I wonder," mumbled the little old man, "if you bought it from who owns it right-ful. 'Fter all, way I heard it, Old Monroe's deal was only for his lifetime—long enough in all conscience." He spat at a crack in the boardwalk. "When it comes to that, whoever bargained for Old Monroe's soul made a fool trade, for Old Monroe's soul was a sure shot anyway to go to—"

"If you're all through laughing," interrupted Berna's father savagely, "maybe someone will remember enough manners to direct us."

"Please, gentlemen," added Berna timidly from beside her father. She was slender where he was gaunt, appealing where he was grim. Her dark wide eyes sought a loiterer, who removed his palmleaf hat.

"If you're set on it," said this one, "you follow the street out, along the pavement. Miss the turn into Hanksville, then go left on a sand road. Watch for a little stone bridge over a run, with a big bunch of willows. Across the run, beyond them willows, is a private road. All grown up, and not even rabbit hunters go there. Well, at the other end is your new house, and I wish you luck." He fiddled with the hat. "You'll need it."

"Thank you kindly," said Berna's father. "My name's Ward Conley. I'll be your neighbor at the Old Monroe farm. And if you think you'll play any ghost jokes around there at night, remember I'm moving in with a shotgun, which I can use tolerably well."

He started the car. Berna heard the men start talking again, not laughing now.

"I didn't think," she ventured as they drove out of the little town in the last red sunglow, "that the story we heard was taken so seriously." She looked at her father. "I didn't even pay attention when the farm broker mentioned it. Tell me all of it."

"Nervous, Berna?" demanded Ward Conley.

"No. Just curious."

"It's the sort of yarn that's pinned on some house in every district where history's old enough, and ghost-believing gawks are plentiful enough. What I heard was that the farmer owner, the one they called Old Monroe, came here eighty years ago and took a piece of land that seemed worthless. By working and planning he made it pay richly. He never got married, never mixed with his neighbors, never spent much of what he took in, and he lived to be more than a hundred. Knowing so little about him, the corn-crackers hereabouts made up their own story. That Old Monroe made a sort of bargain with—well—"

"With the devil?"

"Maybe. Or anyway some old Indian spirit of evil. They said the bargain included a magic-built house, the richest of crops, and more money than anyone for miles around. Old Monroe got the last named, anyway. When he died, he died raving. Most hermits and misers are crazy. Since then nobody goes near the place. A second cousin up in Richmond inherited, and sold to us for a song."

"A bargain with devils," mused Berna. "It sounds like Hawthorne."

"It sounds like foolishness," snapped Conley. "Any devils come bargaining around, I'm enough of a business man to give them the short end of the deal."

IN A CITY to the north, big John Thunstone listened earnestly as he leaned across a desk.

"You don't mean to tell me, Mr. Thunstone," said the professor opposite, "that you're really serious about the Shonokin myths?"

"I discount nothing until I know enough to judge," replied Thunstone. "The hint I picked up today is shadowy. And you're the only man who has made an intelligent study of the subject."

"Only the better to finish my American folkways encyclopedia," deprecated the other. "Well the Shonokins are supposed to be a race of magicians that peopled America before the Red Indians migrated from—wherever they migrated from. One or two commentators insist that Shonokin wizardry and enmity is the basis for most of the Indian stories of supernatural evils,

everything from the Wendigo to those nasty little tales about singing snakes and the Pukwichee dwarfs. All mention we get of Shonokins today—and it's mighty slim—we get third or fourth hand. From old Indians to recent ones, through them by way of first settlers to musty students like me. There's an amusing suggestion that Shonokins, or their descendants, actually exist today here and there. Notably in the neighborhood of—"

"I wonder," broke in John Thunstone, rather mannerlessly for him, "if that isn't the neighborhood I'm so curious about."

IN THE dusk the Conley car passed the Hanksville turn, gained the sand road and crossed the stone bridge. Beyond the willows showed a dense-grown hedge of thorny trees, with a gap closed by a single hewn timber on forked stakes. The timber bore a signboard, and by the glow of the headlights Berna could read the word "PRIVATE." Conley got out, unshipped the barrier, then returned to drive them along a brush-lined road with ruts full of rank, squelchy grass.

A first journey over a strange trail always seems longer than it is. Berna felt that ages had passed before her father stepped on the brake. "There's our home," he said.

At almost the same moment the moon rose, pale and sheeny as a disk of clean, fresh bone.

The pale light showed them a house, built squarely like old plantation manors, but smaller. It had once been painted gray, and still looked well kept and clean. No windows were broken, the pillars of the porch were still sturdy. Around it clung dark, plump masses of shrubbery and, farther back, tall flourishing trees. A flagged path led up to the broad steps. Berna knew she should be pleased. But she was not.

From the rear seat Conley dug their suitcases and rolls of bedding. Berna rummaged for the hamper that held their supper.

She followed her father up the flagstone way, wondering why the night seemed so cool for this season. Conley set down his burdens, then mounted the porch to try the door.

"Locked," he grumbled. "The broker said there was never a key." He turned and

studied a window. "We'll have to break the glass."

"May I help?" inquired a gentle voice, and into view, perhaps from the massed bushes at the porch-side, strolled a man.

He did not stand in the full moonlight, and later Berna would wonder how she knew he was handsome. Slim white-clad elegance, face of a healthy pallor under a wide hat, clear-cut features, deep eyes and brows both heavy and graceful—these impressions she received. Conley came down off the porch.

"I'm Ward Conley, the new owner of this farm," he introduced himself briskly. "This is my daughter, Berna."

The stranger bowed. "I am a Shonokin."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Shannon."

"Shonokin," corrected the man.

"People in town said that nobody dared come here," went on Conley.

"They lied. They usually lie." The man's deep eyes studied Berna, they may have admired. She did not know whether to feel confused or resentful. "Mr. Conley," continued the gentle voice, "you are having difficulty?"

"Yes. The door's jammed or locked."

"Let me help." The graceful figure stepped up on the porch, bending over something. A light glared. He seemed to be holding a little sheaf of home-dipped tapers, such as Berna had seen in very old-fashioned farmhouses. They looked knobby and skimpy, but their light was almost blinding. He held it close to the lock as he stooped. He did not seem to move, but after a moment he turned.

"Now your door is open," he told them. And so it was, swinging gently inward.

"Thanks, Mr. Shonokin," said Conley, more warmly than he had spoken all evening. "Won't you step inside with us?"

"Not now." Bowing again, the man swept his fingertips over the lights he held, snuffing them out. Descending the steps lithely, he walked along the stone flags. At the far end he paused and lifted his hat. Berna saw his hair, long, wavy and black as soot. He was gone.

"Seems like a nice fellow," grunted Conley. "How about some candles of our own, Berna?"

She gave him one from the hamper, and he lighted it and led her inside.

"I know that it's a considerable journey, and that the evidence is slim," John Thunstone was telephoning at Pennsylvania Station. "But I'll get the full story, on the exact spot. I'm sorry you and Dr. Trowbridge can't come. I'll report when I get back." He listened a moment, then chuckled in his trim mustache. "Haven't I always returned. Now, goodbye, or I'll miss my train."

WARD CONLEY lifted his wax candle overhead and grunted approvingly. "I was a little worried, Berna, about buying the place sight unseen, even at a figure that would make the worst land profitable." His eyes gleamed. "But this is worth coming home to, hah?"

The old furniture looked comfortable and in good shape. Berna wondered if the rich carpet in the hall was not valuable. In the room beyond was a table of dark wood, with sturdy chairs around it, and farther on glass-doored closets with china and silver and the white of folded linen. Conley dragged down a hanging lamp.

"Oil in it, and the wick ready trimmed," he announced. With his candle he lighted the lamp and drew it up to the ceiling. "Berna, someone's put this place in apple pie order for us. Even swept and dusted. Might it have been Mr. Shonokin's family? Neighborly, I call it." His stern face was relaxing. They walked into a kitchen, well appointed but cool. There was firewood in the box. Berna set down her hamper. Then they mounted to the upper floor.

"The beds are made," Conley exulted. "This front room will be yours, Berna. I'll take the next one. Suppose we eat now, and poke around more tomorrow. I want to be up early, out at the barn and in the fields."

Returning to the kitchen, they brought out sandwiches and fruit and a jugful of coffee. "It's getting cold," pronounced Conley, peering into the jug. "Let's fire up the range and heat it."

Berna believed that the coffee was hot enough, but she was glad that her father had made an excuse for a fire. The kitchen was downright shuddery. Even while the kindling blazed up, she got a sweater from her suitcase and put it on. They ate in silence, for Conley disliked conversation

while he was at the important business of eating. When Berna had brushed up the crumbs, he yawned.

"Bed now," he decreed, and again took up the candle. Walking through the front room, he drew down the lamp and blew it out. Berna kept close to his heels as they mounted the stairs. The little moving flame that Conley held up made a host of strange and stealthy shadows around them.

ALONE in the room assigned her, Berna drew back the bedclothes. They were so chilly within as to seem damp, but she had brought up a blanket roll from the car. She made the bed afresh, and before creeping in she knelt down. Her prayer was the one taught her as a child, while her mother still lived:

*"Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
Bless the bed I lie upon.*

*There are four corners to my bed,
There are four saints around my head—
One to watch and one to pray,
And two to bear my soul away."*

She remembered her flutter of dread at the last two lines. Though serious and thoughtful, Berna was young. She did not want her soul to be borne away yet. And she felt a close silence about her, as of many lurking watchers.

Of a sudden, there popped into her mind a tag of another bedtime prayer, heard in the long ago from a plantation mammy. She repeated that, too:

*"Keep me from hoodoo and witch,
And lead my path from the poorhouse
gate. . . ."*

The tenseness seemed to evaporate around her. Berna got into bed, listened a while to the sighing of a breeze-shaken tree outside her window, and finally slept soundly until her father's fist on the door told her that it was dawn and time to be up.

They had fried eggs and bacon in the kitchen that remained cool despite the fire that had smouldered in the range all night.

Wiping his mouth at the end of the meal, Ward Conley tramped to the back

door and tugged at the knob. It refused to budge, though he heaved and puffed.

"I wish that Shonokin man was back here to open this, too," he said at last. "Well, let's use the front door."

Out they went together. The early morning was bright and dry, and Berna saw flowers on the shrubs, blue, red and yellow, that were beyond her knowledge of garden botany. They walked around the side of the house and saw a quiet barnyard, with a great red barn and smaller sheds. Beyond these extended rich-seeming fields.

"Something's been planted there," said Conley, shading his eyes with his hand. "If anybody thinks he can use my fields—well, he'll lose the crop he put in. Berna, go back to the house and make a list of the things we need. I'll drive into town later, either Hanksville or that little superstition-ridden rookery we passed through yesterday."

He strolled off, hands in pockets, toward the land beyond the barnyard. Berna again walked around the house and in through the front door. For the first time she was alone in her new home, and fancied that her footsteps echoed loudly, even on the rug in the hall. Back in the kitchen she washed the dishes—there was a sink, with running water from somewhere or other—then sat at the kitchen table to list needed articles as her father had directed.

There was a slight sound at the door, as if a bird had fluttered against it. Berna glanced up, wide-eyed.

That was all. She sat where she was, pencil in fingers, eyes starting and unwinking. She did not move. There was no feeling of stiffness or confinement or weight. Trying, in the back of her amazed and terrified mind, to diagnose, she decided it was like the familiar grammar-school experiment—you clasp your hands and say "I cannot, I cannot," until you find yourself unable to move your fingers from each other. Berna may have breathed, her heart may have beaten, She could not be sure, then or later.

THE door, that had not budged for her father's struggles, was gently swaying open. In stepped Mr. Shonokin, smiling over the glow of his peculiar little sheaf of tapers. He sniffed them, slid the sheaf into

his pocket. And Berna could move again.

Only her eyes moved at first, quartering him over. He wore the white suit, beautifully cut, and of a fabric Berna could not identify—if it were fabric and not some sort of skin, delicately thin and soft and perfectly bleached. His hands, which hung gracefully at his sides, were long and a little strange; perhaps the ring fingers were unnaturally long, longer than the middle fingers. One of them held his wide hat, and the uncovered locks of dead black hair fell in soft waves over Mr. Shonokin's broad brow. As Berna's eyes came to his, he smiled.

"I've been talking to your father," he said, "and now I want to talk to you."

She got to her feet, grateful for the restored power to do so. "Talk?" she echoed. "Talk of what?"

"This place of yours," he told her, laying his hat on the table. "You see, the title isn't exactly clear."

She shook her head at once. She knew her father better than that.

"It's completely clear, Mr. Shonokin. All in order, back to the original grant from the Indians."

"Ah," said Shonokin, still gently. "But where did the Indians get their title? Where? I'll tell you. From us, the Shonokins."

Berna was still trembling, from that strange moment of tranced inaction. She had been hypnotized, she told herself, like Trilby in the book. It must not happen again. She would face this stranger with resolution and defiance.

"You don't mean to claim," she replied, with an attempt at loftiness, "that your family was in this part of the country before the Indians."

"We were everywhere before the Indians," he assured her, and smiled. His teeth were white, perfect, and ever so slightly pointed, even the front teeth that should be square-edged like chisels.

"Then you're Indian yourself," she suggested, but he shook his head.

"Shonokins are not Indians. They are not—" He paused, as if choosing his words. "We are not like any race you know. We are old, even when we are young. We took this country from creatures too terrible for you to imagine, even though they are dead and leave only their fossil bones. We ruled

well, in ways you can't understand." That sounded both sad and superior. "For reasons that you can't understand, either, we were once tired of ruling. That is when we allowed the Indians to come, retaining only limited domains. This is one of them."

"This farm?" prompted Berna. She still held the pencil, so tightly that her fingers were bruising against it.

"This farm," said her visitor. "The Indians never had any right to it. It is ground sacred to the Shonokins, where their wisdom and rule will continue forever. And so any deed dating back to Indians is not lawful. I told your father that, and it's the truth, however stupid and furious he may be."

"Suppose," said Berna, "that you say to my father that you think he's stupid. Tell him to his face. I'd like to see what he does to you then."

"I did tell him," replied the man they knew as Mr. Shonokin. "And he did nothing. He was frozen into silence, as you were just now, when I held up—" His strange-shaped hand moved toward his side pocket, where he had put that strange sheaf of tapers.

"Suppose," went on Berna, "that you get out of this house and off this property."

It was bold, fierce talk for a quiet girl like Berna, but she felt she was managing it splendidly. She took a step toward him. "Yes, right now."

His pointed teeth smiled at her again. He backed smoothly toward the open door and paused on the sill. "You're hasty," he protested gently. "We want only to be fair. You may enjoy this place—enjoy it very much, as Old Monroe did—if you simply and courteously make the same agreement."

"Sell our souls?" Berna snapped, as she had never snapped at anyone before in all her life.

"The Shonokins," he said, "do not recognize the existence of any such thing as a soul."

He was gone, as abruptly as he had gone from the end of the path last night.

BERNA sat down, her heart stuttering inside her. After a minute, her father came in. He, too, sat down. Berna wondered if she were as pale as he.

"That—that—that trick-playing, sneering skunk," he panted. "No man can try things like that on Ward Conley." He looked around. "Did he come in here? Is he still here? If he is, I'm going to get the shotgun."

"He's gone," Berna replied. "I made him go. But who is he? Did he tell you that preposterous story?"

As she spoke, she knew she had believed it all, about the Shonokins who had ruled before the Indians, who wanted to rule again, and who claimed this land, on which nobody could live except as their tenant and vassal.

"He put some sort of a trance or spell on me," said Conley, still breathing hard. "If he hadn't been able to do it, I'd have killed him—there's a hayfork out there in the barn. And he wanted me to believe I'd do some hokus-pokus for him, to be allowed to live here on my own land. Berna," said Conley suddenly, "I think he'll be sneaking back here again. And I'm going to be ready for him."

"Let me go to town when you go," she began, but Conley waved the words aside.

"You'll drive in alone and shop for whatever we need. Because I stay right here, waiting for Mr. Smart Aleck Shonokin." Rising, he walked into the front room, where much of the luggage was still stacked. He returned with his shotgun, fitting it together. It was a well-kept repeater. Ponderously he pumped a shell into the barrel.

"We'll see," promised Conley balefully, "how much lead he can carry away with him."

And so Berna drove the car to the village. At the general store in front of which loiterers had mocked the evening before, she bought flour, potatoes, meat, lard, tinned goods. Her father had stipulated nails and a few household tools, and on inspiration Berna bought two heavy new locks. When she returned, Conley approved this last purchase and installed the locks, one at the front door and one at the back.

"The windows can all be latched, too," he reported. "Let him jimmy his way inside now. I'll give a lot to have him try it." When he had finished his work, Conley picked up the shotgun again, cradling it across his knees. "Now we're all ready for a call from Mr. Shonokin."

But he was tense, nervous, jumpy. Berna cut herself peeling vegetables for supper, and dreaded the dropping of the sun toward the western horizon.

AT HANKSVILLE, several townsfolk had ambled out to see the afternoon train arrive. They stared amiably at the one disembarking passenger, a broad giant of a man with a small mustache, who addressed them in a voice that sounded purposeful and authoritative.

"Old Monroe's," they echoed his first question. "Lookie, mister, nobody ever goes there."

"Well, I'm going there at once. A matter of life and death. Will anybody let me rent his automobile?"

Nobody answered that at all.

"How do you get there?" he demanded next, and someone told about the crossing, the sanded road, the stone bridge, the clump of willows, the side trail.

"And how far?"

Ten miles, opined one. A companion thought it might be nearer twelve.

John Thunstone looked up at the sinking sun. "Then I have no time to waste," he said, "for I'll have to walk it."

He strode off through Hanksville. Those who had spoken with him now watched him go. Then they turned to each other, shook their heads, and made clicking sounds with their tongues.

IT WAS not easy for Conley to explain to Berna all that had passed between him and Shonokin. In the first place, Conley had been both furious and alarmed, and was still so. In the second, there was much he could not understand.

It seemed that the visitor had bobbed up at Conley's elbow, with that talent he had for appearing and disappearing so quickly. He had courteously admired the growing fields of corn and beans, and when Conley had repeated his complaint that someone was making free with the ground, had assured Conley that these things had been planted and were growing for the Conleys alone. He, Shonokin, took credit for the putting in and advancement of what looked like a prize crop.

"And then," Conley told Berna, "he took up the question of payment. I said, 'Of

course, that I'd be glad to give him something for his trouble. Whatever was fair, I said. And he out with an idea you'd never believe—not even though I swear to every word he said."

Shonokin wanted the Conleys to live comfortably, pleasantly, even richly. He was willing to give assurance that there would never be anything to limit or endanger their material prosperity. But, here and now, Conley must admit by signed paper his indebtedness and dependency.

"Dependency!" Conley fairly exploded, describing the scene to his daughter. "Dependency—on that young buck I never even saw before last night! I just stood there, wondering which word to say first, and he went on with the idea that he and his bunch—whoever the Shonokins might be—would make themselves responsible for the crops and the profits of this place, deciding what would be raised and see that it succeeded. Then I blew up."

He paused, and his face went a shade whiter. He looked old.

"I told you what came after that. I grabbed for the hayfork. But he held up his hand, that hand he carries that gives off light."

"The little candles?" prompted Berna.

"It's a hand, I tell you, a sort of skinny hand. It has lights on the fingers. I froze like a wooden Indian in front of a cigar store. And he grinned that ugly way he has, and told me that I now had time to think it over quietly; that I'd better be a good tenant, and that he and we could be a wonderful help to each other if we didn't lose any energy by quarreling. I couldn't move until he walked away out of sight."

Conley shuddered. "What," he demanded savagely, "is he driving at? Why does he want to run our affairs?"

That question, reflected Berna to herself, had been asked countless times in the world's history by people who could not understand tyranny. Tyrants alone could understand, for they lived tormented by the urge and appetite and insistence to dominate others.

"He won't come back," she said, trying to be confident and not succeeding.

"Yes, he will," replied Conley balefully, "and I'll be ready for him." He patted the shotgun in his lap. "Is supper about done?"

It was, but they had little appetite. Afterwards Berna washed the dishes. She thought she had never felt such cold water as gushed from the faucet. Conley went into the front room, and when Berna joined him he sat in a solid old rocking chair, still holding the shotgun.

"The furniture's nice," said Berna lamely. "Reminds me of another thing that skunk said," rejoined Conley. "That his Shonokins had made all the furniture, as well as the house. That it—the furniture—was really theirs and would do what they said. What did he mean?"

Berna did not know, and did not reply. "Those new locks weren't made by him," Conley went on. "They won't obey him. Let him try to get in."

When Conley repeated himself thus aimlessly, it meant that he was harassed and daunted. They sat in the gathering gloom, that the hanging lamp could not dispel successfully. Berna wished for a radio. There was one in the car, and this was a night for good programs. But she would not have ventured into the open to meet the entire galaxy of her radio favorites in person. Later on perhaps they'd buy a cabinet radio for this room, she mused; if they lasted out the evening, and the next day and the days and nights to follow, if they could successfully avoid or defeat the slender dark man who menaced them.

CONLEY had unpacked their few books. One lay on the sideboard near Berna's chair, a huge showy volume of Shakespeare's works that a book agent had sold to Berna's mother years ago. Berna loved Shakespeare no more and no less than most girls of limited education and experience. But she remembered the words of a neighbor, spoken when the book was bought; Shakespeare could be used, like the Bible, for "casting sortes." It was an old-country custom, still followed here and there in rural America. You opened the book at random and hastily clapped your finger on a passage, which answered whatever troubled you. Hadn't the wife of Enoch Arden done something like that, or did she remember her high school English course rightly?

She lifted the volume into her lap. It fell open of itself. Without looking at the fine double-columned type, she put out her

forefinger quickly. She had opened to Macbeth. At the head of the page was printed: "Act I, Scene 3." She stooped to read in the lamplight:

"Were such things here as we do speak about,

*Or have we eaten on the insane root,
That takes the reason prisoner?"*

That was close enough to what fretted her and her father. Shakespeare, what she knew of him, was full of creepy things about prophecies, witches, phantoms, and such. The "insane root"—what was that? It had a frightening sound to it. Anyway, Shonokin had momentarily imprisoned their minds with his dirty tricks of hypnotism. Again she swore to herself not to be caught another time. She had heard that a strong effort of will could resist such things. She took hold of the book to replace it on the sideboard.

She could not.

As before, her eyes could not blink, her muscles could not stir. She could only watch as, visible through the hallway beyond, the front door slowly moved open and showed the dead pale light that Shonokin could evoke.

He glided in, white-clad, elegantly slender, grinning. He held his light aloft, and Conley had been right. It was shaped like a hand. What had seemed to be a joined bunch of tapers were the five fingers, each sprouting a clear flame. Berna saw how shriveled and shrunken those fingers were, and how bones and tendons showed through the coarse skin of their backs. Shonokin set the thing carefully on a stand by the door to the hallway. It was flat at the wrist end, it stayed upright like the ugliest of little candlesticks.

Shonokin walked closer, gazing in hushed triumph from the paralyzed Conley to the paralyzed Berna.

"Now we can settle everything," he said in his gentle voice, and stuck a terrible little laugh on the end of the words. He paused just in front of Berna's fixed eyes. She could study that white suit now, could see the tiny pore-openings in the strange integument from which it was tailored. His slender hands, too, with their abnormally long ring fingers—they did not have human nails but talons, narrow and curved and trimmed

most carefully to cruel points, as if for better rending.

"Mr. Conley is beyond any reasonable discussion," the creature was saying. "He is an aging man, harsh and boastful and narrow from his youth upwards. But Miss Berna—" His eyes slid around to her. Their pupils had a lean perpendicularity, like the pupils of a cat. "Miss Berna is young," he went on. "She is not reckless or greedy or violent. She will listen and obey, even if she does not fully understand, the wise advice of the Shonokins."

He rested his hands, fingers spread, on the heavy table. It seemed to stir at his touch, like a board on ripply water.

"She will obey the better," said their captor, "when she sees how simply we go about removing her father, with his foolish opposition. Conley," and the eyes shifted to the helpless man, "you were so mannerless today as to doubt many of the things I told you. Most of all you seemed to scorn the suggestion that this furniture can move at my bidding. But watch."

THE slender hand was barely touching the table-top. Shonokin drew together his spread fingertips, the sharp horny talons scraping softly on the wood. Again the table creaked, quivered, and moved.

Spiritualism, Berna insisted to herself. Mediums did that sort of illusion for customers at paid seances. Men like Dr. Dunninger and John Mulholland wrote articles in the newspapers, explaining the trickery. This Shonokin person must be a professional sleight-of-hand performer. He made as if to lift the hand. The table shifted again, actually rising with the gesture, as if it were of no weight and gummed to his fingers.

"You see that it does obey," the gentle voice pointed out. "It obeys, and now I give you the full measure of proof, Conley. This table is going to kill you."

Shonokin stepped toward Conley's rocking chair, and the table stepped with him.

"It is heavy, Conley, though I make it seem light. Its wood is dark and ancient, and almost as solid and hard as metal. This table can kill you, and nobody can sensibly call the death murder. How could your law convict or punish an insensible piece of furniture, however weighty?"

Again he stepped toward Conley. Again the table kept pace. It was like some squat, obedient farm beast, urged along by its master's touch on its flank.

"You will be crushed, Conley. Berna, do you hear all this? Make careful note of it, and tell it to yourself often; for when things are all over, you will realize that you cannot tell it to others. Nobody will believe the real nature of your father's death. It cannot appear otherwise than a freak accident—a heavy table tipped over upon him, crushing him. What narrow-brained sheriff or town marshal would listen if you told the truth?"

Even if she had been able to speak, Berna could not have denied his logic.

"And after your father is dead, you will be recognized as mistress here. You will have learned to obey my people and me, recognize our leadership and guidance. This farm is both remote and rich. It will form our gathering point for what we wish to do in the world again. But first—"

Once more his hand shifted. The table began slowly to rear its end that was closest to where Conley sat.

It was long and massive, and it creaked ominously, like an ancient drawbridge going up. The thick legs that rose in air seemed to move, like the forefeet of a rearing, pawing horse. Or was that a flicker of pale light from the candle-hand yonder?

"Nearer," said Shonokin, and the table pranced forward, its upper legs quivering. They would fall in a moment like two pile-drivers. "Nearer. Now—"

Something moved, large and broad but noiseless, in at the front door. An arm darted out, more like a snake than an arm. The candle-hand flew from where it had been placed, struck the floor, and a foot trod on it. All five of its flames went out at once.

Shonokin whirled, his hand leaving the table. It fell over sidewise, with a crash that shook the windows. One second later came a crash still louder.

Conley had risen from his chair, jammed the muzzle of the shotgun against Shonokin's ribs, and touched the trigger. The charge almost blew the slender man in two.

It took all of John Thunstone's straining thews to set the table right again. Then he sat on its edge, speaking to Conley and

Berna, who sagged in their chairs too exhausted for anything but gratitude.

"The magic used was very familiar," Thunstone was saying. "The 'hand of glory' is known in Europe and in old Mexico, too." He glanced at the grisly trodden-out thing, still lying on the floor. "You'll find it described in Spence's Encyclopedia of Occultism, and a rhymed tale about it in Ingoldsby Legends. The hand of a dead murderer—and trust people like the Shonokins to be able to secure that—is treated with saltpeter and oils to make it inflammable. We needn't go into the words that are said over it to give it the power. Lighted by the proper sorcerer, it makes locks open, and all inside the house remain silent as death."

"You were able to move," reminded Conley.

"Because I came in after the hand had laid the spell. I wasn't involved, any more than your visitor himself," and Thunstone glanced at the silent, slender body covered by a blanket on the floor.

"Is the hand of glory also Shonokin magic?" asked Berna. "Did they perhaps learn it first, and teach it to those other peoples?"

"About the Shonokins I know very little more than you yourselves seem to have heard. It seems evident that they do exist, and that they plan to be active in the world, and that they do feel a claim on this land of yours, and so on. But the death of one of them may deter the others."

"How?" asked Conley.

"You and I will bury him, under the flag-

stones at the far end of your walk. His body will keep other Shonokins from your door. They are a magic-minded lot, and a dangerous one, but they fear very few things more than they fear their own dead."

"What will the law say?" quavered Berna.

"Nothing, if you do not speak, and how can you speak? From outside I heard this one say, very truthfully, that the real story would never be believed, even in this superstitious district. Let it go with what I suggest. Justice has certainly been done. I doubt if you will be bothered by more Shonokins, though they may be heard from elsewhere."

"But what are they?" cried Berna. "What?"

Thunstone shook his great head. "My studies are anything but complete. All I know is that they are an old people and clever, very sure of their superiority, and that the ways they hope to follow are not our ways. Mr. Conley, are you ready?"

Conley departed to fetch spade and pick. Alone with Thunstone and the body under the blanket, Berna spoke:

"I don't know how to say how thankful I am—"

"Then don't try," he smiled. Berna laid her little hand on his huge arm.

"I will pray for you always," she promised.

"Prayers are what I greatly need," replied Thunstone, very thankfully on his own part.

For he remembered how, at the moment of his leaving New York, he had heard that one Rowley Thorne had been discharged as cured from an insane asylum.



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Thorne on the Threshold

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN



M R. GALLENDER, as superintendent of an asylum for the insane, was by training hard to daunt or embarrass. But he was not enjoying this final interview with a newly discharged patient. His round, kind face showed it.

"You are the second name on my list, doctor," Rowley Thorne told him across the desk in the office. "It is not a large list, but everyone implicated in my unjust confinement here shall suffer. You are second, I say, and I shall not delay long before giving you my attention." Thorne's lead-colored tongue moistened his lead-colored lips. "John Thunstone comes first."

"You're bitter," said Gallender, but neither his tone nor his smile were convincing. "It'll wear off after a day or so of freedom. Then you'll realize that I never bore you any ill-will or showed special discrimination. You were committed to this institution through the regular channels. Now that you've been re-examined and certified cured, I feel only happiness for you."

"Cured!" snorted Thorne. His great hairless dome of a head lifted like the turret of a rising submarine. His eyes gleamed above his hooked nose like the muzzles of the submarine's guns. "I was never insane. False testimony and stupid, arbitrary diagnosis landed me here. It's true that I had time in your institution to perfect various knowledges by meditation. Those knowledges will help me to deal with you all—as you deserve."

His eyes gleamed palely. Dr. Gallender drew himself up.

"You're aware," said the doctor, "that this kind of talk may well land you back in the ward from which you're being released. If I call for yet another board of examination—"

Heading by MATT FOX

Science calls it another dimension, mysticism calls it another plane, religion another existence—all call it evil!

Thorne sprang up from his chair. He was big and burly in his shabby clothes. He straightened to his full height, six feet and a little more. No, decided the doctor, six feet and considerably more. Six feet and a half—perhaps six feet seven—

"You're growing!" Gallender cried, his voice shrill with sudden baffled alarm.

"Call in your examiners." It was Thorne's voice, though his tight-clamped gash of a mouth did not seem even to twitch. "Call them in to see—to judge if I am crazy when I claim powers beyond anything you ever—"

He towered up and up, as if his wide slab shoulders would hunch against the ceiling. Dr. Gallender, cowering in his chair despite himself, thought a mist was thickening before his eyes in that quiet, brilliantly-lighted room. Rowley Thorne's fierce features churned, or seemed to churn and blur and writhe.

Next moment, abruptly, the illusion of height and distortion—if it was an illusion—flicked away. Rowley Thorne was leaning across the desk.

"Give me my release." He picked up the paper from in front of Dr. Gallender, who made no sound or motion to detain him. "If you're wise, you'll pray never to see me again. Except that prayer won't help you."

He tramped heavily out.

Left alone, Dr. Gallender picked up his telephone. Shakily he called Western Union, and shakily he dictated a wire. Then he rose and went to a wall cabinet, from which he took a glass and a bottle. Flouting one of his most rigid customs, he poured and drank whiskey in solitude, and it was a double drink at that. Then he poured another double drink.

But he collapsed before he could lift it to his mouth.

WHEN John Thunstone returned to New York from the south, his air would have puzzled even his few close friends. The drawn, wondering expression around deep dark eyes and heavy jaw was contradicted by the set of the giant shoulders and the vigorous stride that took him about the business he must now transact.

"Dr. Gallender's still in a coma," said the interne at the hospital. "Half a coma, anyway. He rouses to take nourishment when it's put to his mouth. He turns over from

time to time, like a healthy sleeper. But his pulse and his involuntary reactions are feeble, and he doesn't voluntarily respond to voices or other stimuli more than once or twice a day. Diagnosis not yet complete."

"Which means that the doctors don't know what's the matter with him," summed up Thunstone. "Here's my authorization from his attending physician to see Dr. Gallender."

The interne reflected that he had heard somewhere how John Thunstone could secure authorization to do almost anything. He led the way along a hospital corridor and to the private room where the patient lay, quiet but not utterly limp. Gallender's face was pale, his eyes closed tightly, but he opened his mouth to allow a nurse to introduce a spoonful of broth.

Thunstone looked, a long strong forefinger stroking his cropped black mustache. Then he bent his giant body, his dark, well-combed head close to Gallender's.

"Dr. Gallender," said Thunstone, quietly but clearly. "Do you hear?"

It seemed that Gallender did hear. He closed his mouth again and lifted his head a dreamy, languid hair's-width from the pillow. Then he relaxed again.

"You can understand me," said Thunstone. "You sent me a warning wire. It was forwarded to me from New York. I hurried here at once, to learn about Rowley Thorne."

"Thorne," muttered Gallender, barely louder than a faint echo. "Said I would be second."

"You sent me a wire," repeated Thunstone, bending still closer. "I am John Thunstone."

"Thunstone," said Gallender, an echo even softer than before. "He will be first."

And Gallender subsided, with the gentlest of sighs. He did not open his mouth for more broth.

"He does not rouse more than that," volunteered the nurse. "It's like anaesthesia of some sort."

"He will be first, I will be second," said Thunstone under his mustache, as if to record the words on his memory. To the interne he said, "What's the full report on him?"

They stepped into the corridor again. "He was found unconscious in his office at the asylum," said the interne. "He had just re-

leased that man you mentioned, Rowley Thorne. Later a clerk came in and found him. There was some spilled liquor and at first they thought intoxication. Then poisoning. Now nobody knows. Thorne was checked by New York police, but there's no evidence to hold him."

"Did Thorne leave New York?"

"He gave a Greenwich Village address. The police have it. Apparently he's still there. Did you ever see a case like this, Mr. Thunstone? It's not quite human, somehow."

Thunstone glanced back through the doorway, eyeing the quiet form on the cot. "No, not quite human," he agreed slowly. "More like something similar among—insects."

Insects, Mr. Thunstone?"

"Tear open a wasp nest."

"Not while I'm in my right mind," murmured the interne, smiling slightly.

"In such nests," went on Thunstone, mildly lecturing, "you find other insects than wasps. Sometimes caterpillars, sometimes grubs, in some cases spiders. These strangers are always motionless. They've been stung into control by the wasps."

"Because the wasps lay their eggs in them," replied the interne. He shrugged his shoulders to show that he disliked the idea. "When the eggs hatch, the young start eating."

"But in the meantime," Thunstone said, "The prey remains alive but helpless, waiting the pleasure and plans of its conqueror." He looked at Gallender, once again. "I won't talk about hypnosis in its very derived forms, or about charms, spells and curses. You're studying medicine, and you'd better remain an empiricist. But don't worry about the patient unless you hear that I've been destroyed. And don't wait with your breath held to hear that, either. Goodbye, and many thanks."

HE LEFT. Outside it was evening, and he sought his hotel.

Knowing in a general sort of way what might be at the door of his room, Thunstone found it. A tiny fresh white bone from a toad or a lizard, bound with a bow of red silk floss and emitting a strange sickening smell, had been pushed into the keyhole. His key, thoughtlessly inserted, would have crushed the bone. Carefully Thunstone pried

the grisly little object out, catching it in an envelope.

"Standard obeah device," he decided under his breath. "Some day I'll have time to do a real research and decide whether this is a primitive African method, as Seabrook and Hurston say, or a modification of European diabolism. Rowley Thorne will try anything."

Now he studied the jamb and threshold for possible smears of black liquid or scatterings of gray-white powder. He found neither, sighed with relief, and finally unlocked the door and let himself in.

He made two telephone calls, one to a police executive of his acquaintance who gave him Rowley Thorne's Greenwich Village address, the other to room service for dinner and a drink to be sent up. The waiter who brought the tray brought also a folded newspaper. "Left for you downstairs, sir," he told Thunstone. "Room clerk asked me to bring it to you."

"Thanks," said Thunstone. "Put it on the table."

When the man was gone, Thunstone took the salt shaker from the dinner tray and lightly sprinkled a few grains on the paper, watching closely, then took it up and unfolded it. On the upper margin was written a name he knew and which reassured him. He turned to the classified advertisements. Under "Personals" an item was circled:

NEW THRESHOLD OF SPIRIT. You may glimpse truths beyond imagination. Demonstrations nightly, 8:45. Admission \$1.

This was followed by an address, the same Thunstone had just learned from his friend of the police.

"Mmmm," said Thunstone, softly and slowly. He put the paper aside and turned to his dinner. He ate heartily, as always, but first he salted every mouthful. He even sprinkled a few grains in the brandy with which he finished.

When the waiter had taken away the dishes, Thunstone relaxed in his easiest chair. From a bureau drawer he produced a primitive-looking pipe with a bowl of dark blue stone, carved carefully with figures that looked like ideographs. It had been given

him, with reassurances as to its beneficent power, by Long Spear, a Tsichah Indian, a Phi Beta Kappa from a Southern university, and a practising medicine man of his tribe. Thunstone carefully filled the ancient bowl with tobacco mixed with kinnikinnik and, grinning a bit—for he did not like the blend—smoked and smoked, blowing regular clouds in different directions.

When the pipe was finished, Thunstone wrote a letter. It began with the sentence: "If anything fatal or disabling overtakes me within the next few days, please act on the following information," and went on for several pages. When he had done and signed his name, he placed it in an envelope addressed to one Jules de Grandin at Huntington, New Jersey.

Now, from his lower drawer he produced a rectangular box the size of a dressing case, which showed neither keyhole nor draw-catch. By pressing at the middle of the lid, Thunstone made it fly open. Inside were several objects, closely packed, and from among them he selected a reliquary no more than two inches by three. It was of ancient brick-red clay, bound in silver, and its lid, too, must be pressed in a certain way to open.

From it Thunstone took a tiny silver bell, that clanged once as he lifted it, with a voice that might have deafened had it not been so sweetly clear. The bell was burnished white, but anyone could judge its age by the primitive workmanship. It had been carved, probably, from a block of metal, rather than cast or hammered. Upon it were carved two names, St. Cecelia and St. Dunstan, the patrons of music and of silversmithing; and a line of latin, in letters almost too fine too read:

Est mea cunctorum terror von daemoniorum.

"My voice is the terror of all demons," said Thunstone aloud.

Muffling the little thimble-sized object in his handkerchief, he stowed it in an inside pocket. By now it was nearly eight o'clock. He went out, mailed the letter, and signaled a taxi.

ONCE there had been two rooms in the apartment, one behind the other, perhaps for parlor and dining room. By the removal of the partition, these had become

one room, a spacious oblong. Its dull walls were hung with gloomy-colored pictures and two hangings with crude but effective figures of men and animals embroidered upon them. At the rear had been built a platform a few inches above the floor level, its boards painted a flat brown. Upon this stood a square table covered with a black velvet cloth that fell to the platform itself. The front part of the room was filled with rows of folding chairs, as for a lecture audience, and fully fifty people sat there. Two candles on the velvet-covered table gave light enough to show the faces of the audience, some stupid, some rapt, some greedy, some apprehensive. There were more women than men, and more shabby coats than new ones.

A rear door opened and a woman appeared and mounted the platform. She was youngish and wore many bangles and scarfs. In the candle light her hair appeared to be rather blatantly hennaed. From the open door behind her stole soft, slow music, from a little organ or perhaps from a record on a phonograph. The woman faced the audience, her dark eyes big and questioning.

"Do you know why you are here?" she asked suddenly. "Is it for curiosity? Then you may wish you had not come. For worship? But you may not be ready. Because a call came to you that was more direct than what you have read or heard? That will be true for some of you."

Her wide eyes fluttered shut. "I am a medium, sensitive to spirits both alive and dead. I feel influences, and not all of them honest. In this room is a spy. He calls himself a journalist. Will he speak?"

There was some fidgeting and muttering, but nobody spoke. The woman's eyes opened, and fixed coldly on a young man in the rear of the room. "You," said the woman. "You came here to find something sensational or ridiculous to write about. Get out."

"I paid my dollar—" began the reporter.

"It is returned to you," she interrupted, and he flinched, then stared at a crumpled bit of paper that had sprung into view in his empty hand. "Go, I tell you."

"I have a right to stay," insisted the newspaper man, but even as he spoke he rose. It was an involuntary motion, as though he had been drawn erect by a noose of rope. Stumbling a little, he went to the door, opened it, and departed.

"Does anyone else come with enmity or a sneer?" challenged the woman on the platform. "I see a girl on the front row. She thought she would see or hear something tonight that would amuse her bridge club. She has her dollar back. Let her leave."

There was no protest this time. The girl rose and hurried out, clutching in her hand the bill that had come from nowhere.

"To the rest of you, I think, came a clear call," resumed the speaker. "Why else, do you think, you read a vague advertisement, and on the strength of it made a journey and paid money? I know your hearts—or enough of them to feel that you will listen. All I have said is mere preparation, as though I had swept humbly with a broom before the man who will now show himself."

She turned toward the door and nodded, or perhaps bowed a little in reverence. Rowley Thorne appeared, and took her place on the platform. The music stopped. There was absolute silence.

Rowley Thorne stood behind the table, leaning a little forward with his hands on the velvet cover, so that he had a candle on each side of him. He held himself rigid, as if to photograph himself on the attentions of those who watched—a man in dark clothes, of great width, with a chest like a keg and a squat-set hairless head. The candle-glow from beneath his face undershot him with light and made strange shadows with the jut of his chin and brows, the beaky curve of his big nose above his hard-slashed mouth. His eyelids did not flutter, but his gunmetal eyes roved restlessly, as though searching every face in the audience.

"Watch me," he bade after some seconds.

TO THOSE who watched he seemed to be floating closer. But that was only an illusion; he had spread his shoulders and chest, so that they filled more closely the space between the candles. His features, too, broadened and turned heavy like the memorial sculptures sometimes carved gigantically on granite bluffs. Like a face of granite his face maintained a tense immobility, as though Rowley Thorne must strive to keep it still. He grew. He was size and a half now, and swelling. Abruptly his face lost control, writhing and blurring, and he lifted his hands from the table to straighten himself.

There were those in the audience who wanted to move—toward Thorne, or away from him, or to fall on the floor. But none moved, and none felt that they could move. Thorne rose like a magnifying image on a cinema screen, higher and more misty, seeming to quiver and gesture madly as though in a spasm of agony. One person, or perhaps two, thought he was being lifted on an elevator apparatus concealed behind the velvet-draped table. But then he had stepped sideways into full view. No doubts were possible now, he stood upon great columns of legs, a gigantic and grotesque figure out of proportion beyond any agromegalic freak in a side show. His eyes glared as big as peeled eggs, his mouth opened like the gaping of a valise, and his hand like a great spading fork moved toward the candle flames. At its slap they went out, and there was intense darkness in the room.

Quiet in that darkness, save for a woman in the audience who was trying to stifle sobs. Then the candles blazed up again. The henna-haired opener of the program had come back through the rear door and was holding a twisted spill of paper to light the two tags of radiance. Rowley Thorne leaned against the wall at the rear of the platform, gasping and sagging as though after a staggering effort. He was back to his own propertions again.

"I did that, not to startle you, but to convince you," he said between great gulps of air. "Does anyone here doubt that I have power? I have stood on the threshold of the unthinkable—but from the unthinkable 'I bring knowledge for anyone who cares to ask. Question, anyone? Question?'"

The woman who had sobbed stood up. "I came to learn what happened to my sister. She quarrelled with her parents and left, and we couldn't trace—"

"Write to Cleveland," bade Rowley Thorne, his breathing even now. "Write to Dr. J. J. Avery, on East Twenty-third Street. He will tell you how your sister died."

"Died!" echoed the woman faintly, and sat down abruptly.

"Next question," said Rowley Thorne.

It came from another woman, who had lost an emerald-set bracelet that she called a family heirloom. Thorne directed her to search in a locked trunk in her attic, looking for a discarded red purse which held the

jewel. After that came a question from a grizzled oldster about Bronx politics, which Thorne settled readily but with patent disdain. A young man's query as to whether he should marry the girl he had in mind drew from Thorne a simple "Never," staccato but leering. There were other questions, each answered readily, convincingly, and more than often the reply was discouraging. But Rowley Thorne was plain telling each questioner the truth, the truth that he had dredged up from somewhere unknown.

WHEN no more voices ventured, Rowley Thorne permitted himself to show one of his smiles, all hard mouth and no eyes. "This has been a first meeting of what may be a communion of help and knowledge," he said, vague and encouraging. "All who stayed had belief and sympathy. You will be welcome another time, and perhaps more things will be revealed."

He paused on exactly the proper note of half-promise. He bowed in dismissal. The people rose from their seats and filed out, murmuring to each other.

When the door closed, Thorne turned to his henna-haired companion. "You got the names?"

"Each as they stood up to speak," she nodded, above a pencilled list. "I took each name as the person came in, and checked them in their seats. Nobody saw me writing. Their attention was all for you."

"Good." He took the paper from her. "I count eleven who brought up private matters they might better have kept to themselves. And even the smallest inquiry was admission of—"

He broke off, glaring into the remote rear corner, where lounged a human bulk as great as his own.

"Continue," said the voice of John Thunstone. "I am listening with the deepest interest."

Thorne and his companion faced savagely toward the big man. The red-haired woman drew herself up. "How did you come here?" she demanded tremulously. "And how did you remain without my knowledge?"

"Your mind-reading powers are not as perfect as you think," replied Thunstone, rising from where he sat. "When I was a boy I learned to think behind a wall. The untrained minds of the others were open to

you, you could detect mockery and enmity and banish those who felt it. Meanwhile I had slipped in with the crowd and sat in this dimmest corner." He addressed Thorne. "Why did you break off. You were going to say you had a hold on all who listened to you here."

Thorne's lips twitched thinly and moistly. "I venture to remind you that you are a trespasser in a lodgings leased by myself. If something tragic happened to you, the law would reckon it no more than justified by your intrusion."

"Law!" echoed Thunstone, walking toward him.

He and Thorne were very much of a size. Each grinned with his lips and gazed with hard, watchful eyes. The red-haired woman glanced from one to the other in plain terror.

"Law, Thorne!" said Thunstone again. "You have a sound respect for such as help you. I know of nobody more bound by rules than yourself. A hold, I was saying, on those who heard and saw your performance tonight. That checks almost exactly with what I foresaw."

"You know so little that we pity you," taunted the red-haired woman.

"Store up your pity for your own needs," Rowley Thorne told her. "Thunstone does not consider himself a pitiable figure. I permit him to go on talking, for a little while."

"The classic demonologists," Thunstone continued, "agree that those who attend evil ceremonies and do not protest or rebel are therefore sealed communicants of black worship. You've collected the beginnings of a following, haven't you, Thorne? You're already planning how to rivet your hold on every person—on this one by fear, on that one by favor, on the other by blackmail."

"I'm able to stand alone," growled Thorne deeply.

"But those you serve demand worshippers, and you must see to the supply. You have failed before. I know, because I caused the failure. I have disrupted your ceremonies, burned your books, discredited and disgraced you." Thunstone's hard smile grew wider. "I am your bad luck, Thorne."

The red-haired woman had stooped, twitching up her skirt. From a sheath strapped to her leg she drew a slim dagger, but paused, staring at it. "It's broken," she muttered.

"Even your tools fail you," pronounced Thunstone.

Thorne, still standing on the dais, drew a deep breath. It swelled him like a hollow figure of rubber.

The woman stared at him, gasped, and drew away. She could not accustom herself to the phenomenon. Thunstone smiled no longer as he stepped up on the dais, close to Thorne.

"I'm not afraid of you in any size or shape," he said.

AROUND Thunstone the air was close and hot, as though he had entered a cave in the side of a volcano. The dimness of the room seemed to take on a murky red glow, but in that glow Thorne's face and outline grew no clearer. He only swelled. He was already a head taller than Thunstone.

"Moloch, Lucifer, Pemeoth," Thorne was saying, as though to someone behind him, "Anector, Somiator, sleep ye not."

"It is the unknown that terrifies," rejoined Thunstone, as though speaking a rehearsed line in response to a cue. "I know those names and for what beings they stand. I am not afraid."

"Awake, strong Holaha," chanted Thorne. "Powerful Eabon, mighty Tetragramaton. Athe, Stoch, Sada, Erohye!"

Thunstone felt around him the thickening, stifling heat, sensed the deepening of the red glow. There was a crackle in the air as of flames on the driest day of summer. How true, mused Thunstone while he fixed his eyes on the burgeoning form of his enemy, was the instinct of the primitive priest who first described hell as a place of gloomy fires. . . .

Hands were reaching for Thunstone, hands as large as platters. Thunstone smiled again.

"Do you think I am afraid?" he inquired gently, and stepped forward within reach of the hands.

A chorus of voices howled and jabbered, like men trying to sound like animals, or like animals trying to sound like men. Thorne's great gouty fingers had seized Thunstone's shoulders, and swiftly released their grip, while Thorne cursed as if in sudden pain. For Thunstone had seized the crumpled sleeves upon the mighty ridged arms, twisting them so that they bound and

constricted like tourniquets. Thunstone's clutch could not be broken.

Thorne's hugeness above him heaved and struggled. But it did not seem to have gained weight in proportion to its size. Thunstone's own solidity anchored it down. "To me!" Thorne was blaring. "To me, you named and you nameless!"

They rallied to his call. Thunstone felt blinded, and at the same time dazzled, by that hot redness; but beings were there, many and near, around him. He clung to the sleeves he had grasped, and Thorne could not break away. Stified, numbed, Thunstone yet summoned his strength, and with a mighty wrench toppled Thorne's overgrown form to its knees. That was enough for the moment. He let go and drove a hand under his coat to the inside pocket.

With a full-armed sweep, he swung the little silver bell.

ITS voice, unthinkable huge as the master chime of a great carillon, rang joyously in that dark lost corner. It drowned the voices that howled at it. It clanged them into dismayed silence, and they shrank from it. Thunstone knew that they shrank, though mercifully he could not see them plainly. They retreated, and with them ebbed the redness and the numbness, and the breathless heat. Thorne was trying to say something, either defiant or pleading, from farther away and farther still. The bell drowned his speech, too. Things became plainer to the eye now, the room was just an ordinary dim room. Thunstone looked for Thorne, and saw him and saw through him, just as the giant outline faded like an image from a screen when the projector's light winks out.

Thunstone stood quiet a moment, breathing deeply. He cuddled the little bell in his palm to muffle its voice, and gazed at it with gratitude.

"I remember part of the old Hymn of the Bell," he said aloud. "'I call the people, I summon the clergy; I weep the departed, I put the pestilence to flight, I shatter the thunderbolts, I proclaim the Sabbaths.'" He looked around for the red-haired woman. "A holy man whom once I helped gave me this bell as a gift. It was made long ago, he told me, to exorcise evil spirits. This is

the third time I have used it successfully."

Carefully he returned the bit of silver to his pocket. Stepping from the dais, he walked across the room and switched on a light that threw white brilliance everywhere. Turning his head, he looked hard for some sign that Rowley Thorne had been there. There was none. Tramping a few steps more, John Thunstone opened two windows.

"This place smells most unoriginally of burning," he commented.

The red-haired woman crouched motionless in the farthest corner from the dais where Thunstone and Thorne had stood together. Stooping above her, Thunstone touched her shoulder. She looked up at him, and rose slowly. Her face was as pale as tallow.

"What will you do with me?" she managed to ask.

"Leave you to think how narrowly you escaped," he replied. "You were not a lieutenant of Thorne, only his servitor. Plainly you know little or nothing of what he was really trying to do. I recommend that you review the story of the sorcerer's apprentice, and keep clear in the future of all supernatural matters. For you have used up a good deal of your normal luck in escaping tonight."

"But what—what—" she stammered.

"The explanation is simple, if you care to accept it. Thorne was on the threshold of—something. Science calls it another di-

mension, mysticism calls it another plane, religion calls it another existence. He could communicate with entities beyond, and claim them for allies. He was able to draw some powers and knowledges, such as his ability to prophesy to those dupes who came. Such powers might have been useful to him, and rankly terrible to the normal world." Thunstone produced his pipe. "By the way, I am heartily in favor of the normal world."

Nearby stood a telephone on a bracket. Without asking permission, Thunstone picked it up and dialed a number. The nurse who answered told him jubilantly that Dr. Gallender had suddenly awakened from his trance, very lively, cheerful and hungry.

"Congratulate him for me," said Thunstone, "and say that I'll join him in a late supper."

He hung up and continued his explanation.

"Thorne gambled everything when he called his allies into this normal region of life to help him. I wanted him to do that. Because, when defeated, they would go back. And with them they would take Thorne. I don't dare hope that he's gone for good, but he'll have considerable difficulty in returning to us."

"But where?" pleaded the woman. "Where did he go?"

"The lesson to be learned from all I have said and done," Thunstone assured her gently, "is not to inquire into such things."



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The Shonokins

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

LESS than five persons have ever seen John Thunstone frankly, visibly terrified, and less than two have lived through subsequent events to tell about it. Fear he knows and understands, for it is his chief study; but he cannot afford it very often as a personal emotion.

And so he only smiled a little that afternoon in Central Park, and the hand at which Sabine Loel, the medium clutched was as steady as the statue of Robert Burns under

which she had asked him to meet her. A few snowflakes spun around them, settling on their dark coats. "I say that you are in more than mortal danger," she repeated breathily. "I would not have dared recall myself to your attention for anything less important."

"I believe that," smiled Thunstone, remembering when last they met, and how he had demonstrated to her complete satisfaction the foolish danger of calling up evil

It is said that living Shonokins fear and avoid only dead Shonokins. . . .



Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

spirits without being ready to deal with them. Not one ounce of his big powerful body seemed tense. His square face was pale only by contrast to his black eyes and black mustache. Not even his restraint seemed overdone.

"Whatever you think of my character, you know that I'm sensitive to spirit messages," she went on. "This one came without my trying for it. Even the spirit control that gave it was in horror. The Shonokins are after you."

"I might have known that," he told her. "After all, I acted with what they might consider officious enmity. I stopped them, I hope, from a preliminary move back toward the world power they say they held before human history began. A Shonokin died, not by my hand but by my arrangement, and his body was buried at a place where I want them never to come—living Shonokins, it seems, avoid only dead Shonokins. Their very nature forces them to strike back at me. But thank you for the warning."

"You think," ventured Sabine Loel, "that I want to be your friend?"

"You do, though your purpose is probably selfish. Thank you again. Now, I never had any malice toward you—so, for your own safety, won't you go away and stay away? Avoid any further complication in—in what's to happen between me and the Shonokins."

"What precautions—" she began to ask.

"Precautions against the Shonokins," explained Thunstone patiently, "are not like precautions against anything else in this world or out of it. Let them be my problem. Good-by."

Going, she looked back once. Her face was whiter than the increasing snowflakes. Thunstone filled his pipe with tobacco into which were mixed one or two rank but significant herbs. Long Spear, the Indian medicine man, had told him how much such things did to fight ill magic.

THUNSTONE was living just then in a very comfortable, very ordinary hotel north of Times Square. He entered the lobby confidently enough, and rode up in the elevator without seeming to be apprehensive. But he paused in the corridor out-

side his own door as cautiously as though about to assail an enemy stronghold.

He bent close to the panels without touching them. Earlier in the day he had closed and locked that door from outside, and had dripped sealing wax in three places at juncture of door and jamb, stamping the wax with the crusader's ring he habitually wore. The wax looked undisturbed, its impress of the cross of Saint John staring up at him.

With a knife-point he pried the blobs away. They had not been tampered with in the least. Inserting his key in the lock, he let himself in and switched on the lights in the curtained sitting room.

At once he started back against the inner side of the door, setting himself for action. His first thought was that two men were there, one prone and one standing tensely poised. But, a hair-shaving of time later, he saw that these were dummies.

The reclining dummy was made of one of Thunstone's suits and a pillow from the bed in the next room. It lay on its back, cloth-stuffed arms and legs outflung. A tightly looped necktie made one end of the pillow into a headlike lump, and on this had been smudged a face, crudely but recognizably that of John Thunstone. Ink from the stand on the desk had been used, to indicate wide, stupid eyes, a slack mouth under a lifelike mustache—the expression of one stricken instantly dead. The other figure stood with one slippered foot on the neck of the Thunstone effigy. It was smaller, perhaps a shade under the size of an average man. Sheets and towels and blankets, cunningly twisted, rolled and wadded together, made it a thing of genuinely artistic proportion and attitude. A sheet was draped loosely over it like a toga, and one corner of this veiled the place where a face would be.

"Substitution magic?" said Thunstone under his breath. "This is something that's going to happen to me. . . ." He turned toward the desk. "What's that?"

On the desk seemed to crouch a little pixy figure. Made from a handkerchief, like a clever little impromptu toy to amuse a child, it looked as though it pored over an open book, the Gideon Bible that is an item in every hotel room. Stepping that way,

very careful **not** to touch anything. Thunstone bent to look.

The book was open to the Prophet Joel, second chapter. Thunstone's eye caught a verse in the middle of the page, the ninth verse:

They leap upon the city; they run upon the wall; they climb up into the houses; they enter in at the windows like a thief.

THUNSTONE has read many books, and the Bible is one of them. He knew the rest of the frightening second chapter of Joel, which opens by foretelling the coming of terrible and ungainsayable people, before which no normal creature could stand. "They enter in at the windows like a thief," he repeated, and inspected his own windows, in the sitting room and the adjoining bedroom. All were closed, and the latches still bore blobs of wax with his seal.

These phenomena had taken place, it remained to be understood, without the agency of any normal entry by normal beings. Movement and operation by forces at a distance—telekinesis was the word for it, fondly used by Charles Richet of France, and tossed about entertainingly by the Fortean and other amateur mystics. Thoughts crossed Thunstone's mind, of broken dishes placed in locked chests by Oriental fakirs and taken out mended; of Harry Houdini's escapes and shackle-sheddings, which many persons insisted were by supernatural power; of how the living body of Caspar Hauser had so suddenly flicked into existence, and of how the living body of Ambrose Bierce had so suddenly flicked out. There were a variety of other riddles, which many commentators purported to explain by the overworked extra-dimensional theory. Somebody or something, it remained, had fashioned a likeness of his own downfall in his own sitting room, without getting in. Again approaching the desk without touching the Bible or the little figure crouched beside it, Thunstone drew out a drawer and produced a sheaf of papers.

The top sheet was a second or third carbon of his own typescript. Other copies of this sheet were sealed in various envelopes with equally interesting documents, placed here and there in the custody of

trusted allies, each envelope inscribed *To be opened only in the event of my death—John Thunstone*. The knowledge that such collections existed was a prime motive of some of Thunstone's worst enemies to keep him alive and well. There was Sabine Loel's warning, for instance. . . . Sitting down well away from the grotesque tableau, Thunstone glanced over his own grouping of known and suggested facts about the Shonokins.

Those facts were not many. The Shonokins were, or said they were, a people who had been fortuitously displaced as rulers of America by the ancestors of the red Indians. A legend which they themselves insisted upon was that ordinary human evolution was one thing and Shonokin evolution another. They hinted here and there at tokens of long-vanished culture and power, and at a day soon to come when their birthright would return to them. To Thunstone's carbon were appended the copy of a brief article on the "Shonokin superstition" from the Encyclopedia of American Folkways; a letter from a distinguished but opinionated professor of anthropology who dismissed the Shonokins as an aboriginal myth less well founded than Hiawatha or the Wendigo; and Thunstone's own brief account of how someone calling himself a Shonokin had made strange demands on the Conley family on a Southern farm, and of what had befallen that same self-styled Shonokin.

Finishing the study of his own notes, Thunstone again regarded the grouped dummies, which he had thus far forborne to touch.

The standing figure, with its foot on the neck of the Thunstone likeness, had hands that thrust out from under its robe. They had been made of a pair of Thunstone's own gloves, and on closer scrutiny proved to be strangely prepared. The forefinger and middle finger of each had been tucked in at the tip, so that the third fingers extended longest. The only Shonokin that Thunstone had ever met had displayed third fingers of that same unnatural proportion. Thunstone nodded to himself, agreeing that this was plainly the effigy of a Shonokin. He turned his mind to the problem of why the images had been thus designed and posed.

A simple warning to him? He did not think so. The Shonokins, whatever they

really were and wanted, would not deal in warnings—not with him at least. Was the group of figures then an actual weapon, like the puppets which wizards pierce with pins to torture their victims? But Thunstone told himself that he had never felt better in his life. What remained? What reaction, for instance, was expected of him?

He mentally put another person in his place, a man of average mind, reaction and behavior. What would such a person do? Tear up the dummies, of course, with righteous indignation—starting with that simulation of the Shonokin with a conquering foot on its victim's neck. Thunstone allowed himself the luxury of a smile.

"Not me," he muttered.

Yet again he went to the desk, and returned the paper to the drawer. He opened another drawer. Catching hold of the Bible, he used it to thrust the little handkerchief-doll into the drawer, closed and locked it in. Then, and not until then, he approached the two full-sized figures. They were arranged on a rug. For all its crumpled-fabric composition, the simulated Shonokin seemed to stand there very solidly. John Thunstone knelt, gingerly took hold of the arm of his own image, and with the utmost deliberation and care eased it toward him, from under the foot of its oppressor. When he had dragged it clear of the rug, he took hold of the edge of the rug itself and drew it smoothly across the floor. The Shonokin shape rode upright upon it. He brought it to the door of the empty sitting room closet, opened the door, and painstakingly edged the thing, rug and all, inside.

This done, he closed and locked the door. From the bedroom he brought sticks of sealing wax, which he always kept in quantity for unorthodox uses. After some minutes, he had sealed every crack and aperture of the closet door, making it airtight. He marked the wax here and there with the Saint John's cross of his ring. Finally returning to his own likeness, he lifted it confidently and propped it upright in a chair, and sat down across from it. He winked at the rough mockery of his own face, which did not seem so blank and miserable now. Indeed, it might be said to wink back at him; or perhaps the fabric of the pillow-slip was folded across one of the smudgy eyes.

A little quiver ran through the room, as though a heavy truck had trundled by somewhere near. But no truck would be operating in the sealed closet.

Thunstone lighted his pipe again, gazing into the gray clouds of smoke he produced. What he may have seen there caused him to retain his smile. He sat as relaxed and motionless as a big, serene cat for minutes that threatened to become hours, until at last his telephone rang.

"Hello," he said into the instrument. "This is John Thunstone."

"You danger yourself," a voice told him, a voice accented in a fashion that he could not identify with any foreign language group in all his experience.

"And you are kind to warn me," replied Thunstone with the warmest air of cordiality. "Are you going to offer me advice, too?"

"My advice is to be wise and modest. Do not try to pen up a power greater than hurricanes."

"And my advice," returned Thunstone, "is not to underestimate the wit or determination of your adversary. Good day."

HE HUNG up the receiver, reached for the Bible, and turned from the Prophet Joel to the Gospel of Saint John. Its first chapter, specified by the old anti-diabolists as a direct indictment of evil magic's weakness, gave him comfort, though he was reading it for perhaps the four hundredth time. The telephone rang again, and again he lifted it.

"I deplore your bad judgment in challenging us," said the same voice that had spoken before. "You are given one more chance."

"That's a lie," said Thunstone. "You wouldn't give me a chance under any circumstances. I won't play into your hands." He paused. "Rather unusual hands you have, don't you? Those long third fingers—"

This time it was his caller who hung up suddenly. Musing, Thunstone selected from his shelf of books a leather-bound volume entitled *These Are Our Ancestors*. He leafed through it, found the place he wanted, and began to read:

Stone-age Europe was spacious, rich

and uncrowded, but it could acknowledge only one race of rulers.

Homo Neanderthalensis — the Neanderthal Man—must have grown up there from the dim beginning, was supreme and plentiful as the last glaciers receded. His bones have been found from Germany to Gibraltar, and his camps and flints and fire-ashes. We construct his living image, stooped and burly, with a great protruding muzzle and beetling brows. Perhaps he was excessively hairy—not a man as we know men, but not a brute, either. Fire was his, and the science of flint-chipping. He buried his dead, which shows he believed in an after-life, probable in a diety. He could think, perhaps he could speak. He could fight, too.

When our true forefathers, the first *Homo Sapiens*, invaded through the eastern mountain passes or out of the great valley now drowned by the Mediterranean, there was battle. Those invaders were in body and spirit like us, their children. They could not parley with the abhorrent foe they found. There could be no rules of warfare, no truces or treaties, no mercy to the vanquished. Such a conflict could die only when the last adversary died.

This dawn-triumph of our ancestors was the greatest, because the most fundamental, in the history of humanity. No champion of mankind ever bore a greater responsibility to the future than that first tall hunter who crossed, all aware, the borders of Neanderthal country.

THE book sagged in Thunstone's hands. His eyes seemed to pierce the mists of time. He saw, more plainly than in an ordinary dream, a landscape of meadow and knoll and thicket, with wooded heights on the horizon. Through the bright morning jogged a confident figure, half-clad in fur, with his long black hair bound in a snake-skin fillet, a stone axe at his girdle and a bone-tipped javelin in one big hand. If the frill of beard had been shaved from his jaw, he might have been taken for John Thunstone.

He was trailing something—the deer he had waylaid and speared earlier in the day. There it was up ahead, fallen and quiet and

dead. The hunter's wise eyes narrowed. Something dark and shaggy crouched beyond it, seeming to drag or worry at the carcass. A bear? The javelin lifted in the big tanned fist, the bearded mouth shouted a challenge.

At that the shaggy thing rose on two legs to face him, and it was not a bear.

Thunstone's eloquent fancy had identified the hunter with himself. It was as if he personally faced that rival for the dead prey, at less than easy javelin-casting distance. It stood shorter than he but broader, its shoulders and chest and limbs thatched with hair. Its eyes met his without faltering, deep bright eyes that glared from a broad shallow face like the face of a shaggy lizard. Its ears pricked like a wolf's, it slowly raised immense hands, and the third fingers of those hands were longer than the other fingers.

Thunstone rose from his chair. The fancied landscape of long ago faded from his mind's eye, and he was back in his hotel sitting room. But the hairy thing with the strange hands was there, too, and it was moving slowly forward.

Thunstone's immediate thought was that he had expected something like this. The Neanderthal man, says H. G. Wells, was undoubtedly the origin of so many unchancey tales of ogres, trolls, mantacors and similar monsters. Small wonder that such a forbidding creature had impressed itself on the night memories of a race. . . . It was not coming toward him, but past him, toward the sealed door. Its strange-fingered hands pawed at the sealed cracks.

Thunstone's pipe was still in his hand. It had not gone out. He carried it to his mouth, drew strongly to make the fire glow, and walked across the carpet to the very side of the hairy thing. When he had come within inches, he blew a thick cloud of the herb-laden smoke into the ungainly face.

Even as it lurched around to glare, it was dissolving like one scene in a motion picture melting into another. It vanished as the smoke-cloud vanished. The telephone was ringing yet a third time.

Patiently he answered it.

"You are now aware," he was told by the same accented voice, "that even your own thoughts may turn to fight you."

"Any man may dismiss his own thoughts," replied Thunstone at once. "I have a special hell to which I send thoughts that annoy me. Can you afford to go on blundering? Why do you not call on me in person? My door is unlocked."

"So is mine," replied the other coldly. "On the floor below yours. Room 712. Come down if you dare."

"I dare, and do defy you for a villain," quoted Thunstone from Shakespeare, who also made a study of supernormal phenomena. Hanging up, he took from his smoking stand a glass ash tray. In this he painstakingly built a gratelike contrivance from paper clips, and upon the little grate kindled a fire of wooden match sticks. When it blazed up, he fed upon it some crumbs of his blended tobacco and herbs, and when these caught fire he poured on a full handful of the pungent mixture. It took the flame bravely. He carried it across the room, setting it in front of the sealed closet. The smoke curled up as from an incense burner, shrouding the entire wall from any magical intruder. Thunstone nodded approval to himself, went out, down one flight of stairs, and knocked on the door marked 712.

The door opened a crack, showing a slice of sallow brown face. A deep black eye peered at Thunstone, and then the door opened. A hand with a too-long third finger waved as if inviting him in. He crossed the threshold.

THE room was dim, with curtains drawn and a single crudely molded candle burning on a center table. Three Shonokins were there—one motionless under a quilt on the bed, one at the door, the third sunk in the armchair. They might have been triplets, all slender and sharp-faced, with abundant shocks of black hair. They all wore neat suits of gray, with white shirts and black ties, but to Thunstone it seemed that they were as strange to such clothing as if they had come from a far land or a far century. The door closed behind him.

"Well?" he said.

The Shonokin by the door and the Shonokin in the chair gazed at him with malignant eyes of purest, brightest black. Their hands stirred, rather nervously. Their fingernails appeared to be sharp, perhaps arti-

ficially cut to ugly points. The Shonokin on the bed neither moved nor stared. Toward him Thunstone made a gesture.

"I guessed more correctly about you than you about me," he said. "Your languid friend yonder—would it be tactless, perhaps to suggest that he lies there without any soul in him? Or that his soul is upstairs, animating a certain rude image which I have sealed carefully away?"

"We," said the seated Shonokin, "have never been prepared to admit the existence of souls."

"Tag it by whatever name you like," nodded Thunstone, "this specimen on the bed seems to be without it, and worse for being without it. Suppose we establish a point from which to go on with our discussion. You were able to fabricate, in my room, a sort of insulting tableau. I, for my part, was to enter, be surprised and angry, and attempt to tear it to pieces. Doing that, I would release upon myself—what?"

"You do not know," said the standing Shonokin tensely. It was his voice, Thunstone recognized, that had given the various telephone messages.

"Oh, it might have been any one of several things that hostile and angry spirits can accomplish," went on Thunstone with an air of carelessness. "I might have become sick, say; or have gone mindless; or the cloth, as I loosened it, might have smothered me strangely, and so on. Strange you went in for such elaborate and sinister attacks, when a knife in the back might have done as well. You intend to kill me, don't you?"

He looked at one of his interrogators, then the other, then once more at the figure on the bed. That Shonokin's face looked as pale as paper under its swarthinness. The lips seemed to quiver, as if trying feebly to gulp air.

"I think that it has been well established," Thunstone resumed, "that when a body sends forth the power that animates it, for good or for evil, it will die unless that power soon returns. But this doesn't touch on why you dared me to come down here. Did you dream that I wouldn't call your bluff. For it was a bluff, wasn't it?"

The eyes of the two conscious Shonokins were like octopus eyes, he decided. The

Shonokins themselves might be compared to the octopus people, whose natural home was deep in ocean-caves, from which specimens ventured on rare occasions to the surface when man could see and divide his emotions between wonder and horror. . . .

"Thank you for giving us another thought to turn against you," said the Shonokin in the chair.

THE dark room swam, swam literally, for to Thunstone it was as though warm rippling waters had come from somewhere to close over his head. Through the semi-transparency writhed lean dark streamers, like a nest of serpents, their tips questing toward him. At the ends furthest from him they joined against a massive oval bladder, set with two eyes like ugly jewels. An octopus—and a big one. Its eight arms, lined with red-mouthed suckers, were reaching for Thunstone.

By instinct, he lifted his hands as though in-defense. His right hand held his pipe, and its bowl emitted a twirl of smoke. Smoke under water!—But this was not water, it was only the sensation of water, conjured out of his chance thought by Shonokin magic. As the wriggling, twisting tentacles began to close around him, Thunstone put his pipe to his lips and blew out a cloud of smoke.

The room cleared. It was as it had been. Thunstone tapped ashes from his pipe, and filled and lighted it as before.

"You see," said the seated Shonokin, "that any fancy coming into your mind may blossom into nightmare. Is it a pleasant future to foresee, John Thunstone? You had better go up and open that sealed door."

Thunstone's great head shook, and he smiled under his mustache. "Just now," he said, "I am thinking of someone very like you, who died and was buried at the Conley farm. Why not make him appear out of my meditations?"

"Silence!" snarled the Shonokin who had opened the door. His hand lifted, as if to menace Thunstone with its sharp nails. "You do not know what you are talking about."

"But I do," Thunstone assured him gently. "Living Shonokins fear only dead Shonokins."

"Shonokins do not die," gulped the one in the dark.

"You have tried to convince yourselves of that by avoiding all corpses of your kind," Thunstone said, "yet now you are in dread of this dying companion of yours. His life is imprisoned upstairs. Without it he strangles and perishes. I learn more and more about your foolish Shonokin ways."

"You learn about us?" snapped the standing one. "We are ancient and great. We had power and wisdom when your fathers were still wild brutes. When you understand that—"

"Ancient?" broke in Thunstone. "Yes, you must be. Only an unthinkable old race could have such deep-seated folly and narrowness and weakness. Do you really think that you can swarm out again from wherever you have cowered for ages, to overthrow mankind? Human beings at least dare look at their own dead, and to move-over those dead to win fights. You vain and blind Shonokins are like a flock of raiding crows, to be frightened away by hanging up a few carcasses of your own kind—"

"I have it!" cried the Shonokin who had stood by the door.

Weasel-swift and weasel-silent, he had leaped at Thunstone, snatched the pipe, and leaped away again. A wisp of the smoke rose to his pinched nostrils, and he dropped the pipe with a strange exclamation that might have been a Shonokin oath.

"Without that evil-smelling talisman," said the seated one, "I leave you to your latest fancy—raiding crows."

The room was swarming full of them, black and shining and clatter-voiced. A whirl of many wings, a cawing chorus of gaping bills, churned around Thunstone, fanned the air of the room. Then, of a sudden, they were swarming—where?

"Now do you believe that your kind can die?" said Thunstone bleakly, his voice rising above the commotion. "The crows believe it. For they attack the dead, not the living."

THE crows, or the vision of them, indeed thronged over and upon the bed, settling into a black, struggling mass that hid the form that lay there.

"I thought on purpose of carrion-birds," said Thunstone. "Your power to turn thoughts into nightmares has rebounded."

He spoke to the backs of the two living Shonokins. They were running. He wondered later if they opened the door or, by some power of their own, drifted through it. He followed them as far as the hall, in time to see them plunging down the stairway.

Stepping back into the room, he retrieved his pipe and drew upon it. At the first puff of smoke the crows were gone, leaving him alone with the silent figure on the bed.

Now he made sure, touching the chill wrist and twitching up a flaccid eyelid, that the Shonokin was dead. He made a tour of the room, in which there seemed to be no luggage—only a strange scroll of some material like pale suede, covered with characters Thunstone could not identify, but he pocketed it for more leisurely study. Out into the hall he strolled, smoking thoughtfully. He was beginning to like that herb mixture, or perhaps he was merely grateful to it.

Back in his own quarters, he opened the sealed closet door without hesitation. On the floor lay a crumpled heap of sheets, garments and other odds and ends, as if

something had worn them and had shaken them off. Thunstone carried them into his bedroom, then dismantled the image of himself. He telephoned for a chambermaid to make the bed and a tailor to press the suit.

At length he departed to find a favorite restaurant. He ordered a big dinner, and ate every crumb with an excellent appetite.

When he returned to the hotel late that evening, the manager told him of the sudden death, apparently from heart disease, of a foreign-seeming man in Room 712. The man had had friends, said the manager, but they could not be found. He was about to call the morgue.

"Don't," said Thunstone. "I met him. I'll arrange funeral details and burial."

For a Shonokin corpse, buried in the little private cemetery on the farm he had inherited, would make that refuge safe from at least one type of intruder.

The manager, who knew better than to be surprised at Thunstone's impulses, only asked, "Will you notify his relatives?"

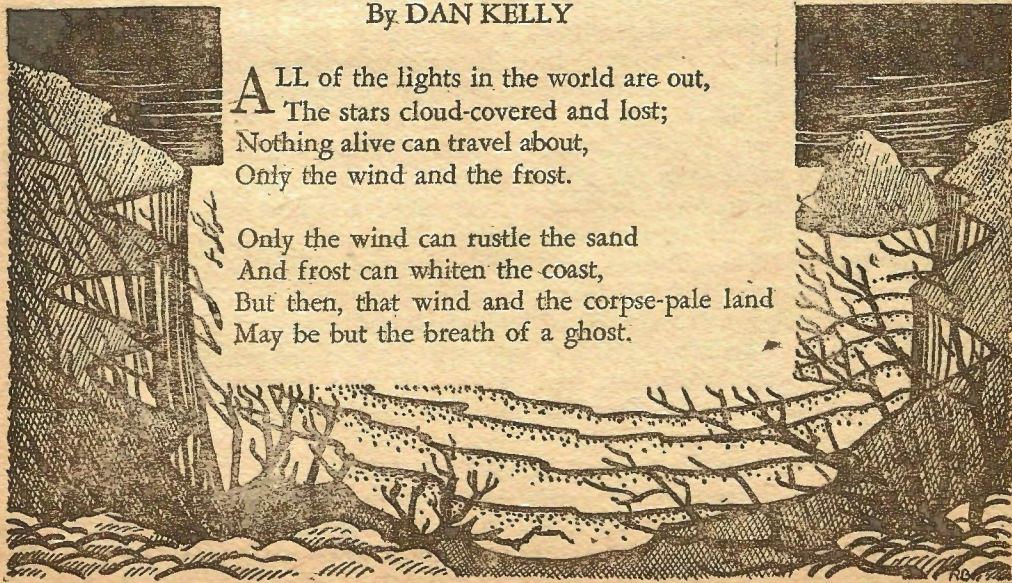
"None of his relatives will care to come to the funeral," Thunstone assured the manager, "or anywhere near his grave."

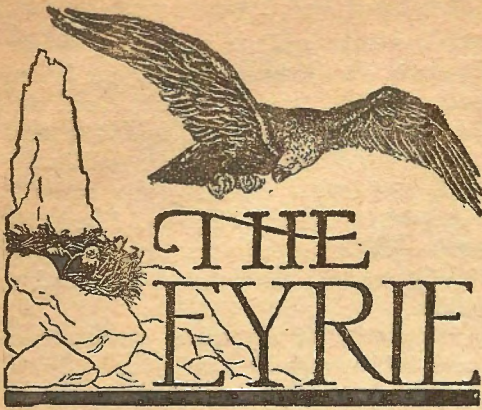
Wind Walks Not Alone

By DAN KELLY

ALL of the lights in the world are out,
The stars cloud-covered and lost;
Nothing alive can travel about,
Only the wind and the frost.

Only the wind can rustle the sand
And frost can whiten the coast,
But then, that wind and the corpse-pale land
May be but the breath of a ghost.





Not Beast Nor Man

FOR sometime we have pestered Manly Wade Wellman for more information about that "Myth" that may not be a myth, the one concerning the Shonokins.

Manly Wellman is taking his own time to reveal the sinister nature and macabre ambitions of the Shonokins through the eyes and experiences of John Thunstone.

However, he did pass along the following to us:

To those who have been kind enough to ask for "real information" on the Shonokins, I can only point to the very, very meager dossier that Thunstone himself reveals in the current account. The few beside Thunstone who have ever heard of the Shonokins by name are apt to dismiss them as a "myth."

The only people who know the truth about them died many thousands of years ago.

Our ancestors who fought before history's dawn against creatures that were not beast nor man settled the greatest war question of all time when they established the rule of their descendants on Earth—but whether they settled that question eternally remains to be seen. We know only what happened in Europe, the one continent where paleontologists have made a fairly thorough study of remains. What about America—Asia—other places where the beaten but perhaps not obliterated race of the enemy gathered and prepared—and may be now organizing for a return battle?

But if the Shonokins are dangerous, we are dangerous to them. Thunstone has fought no more than the early minor skirmishes before the decisive engagement.

Manly Wade Wellman

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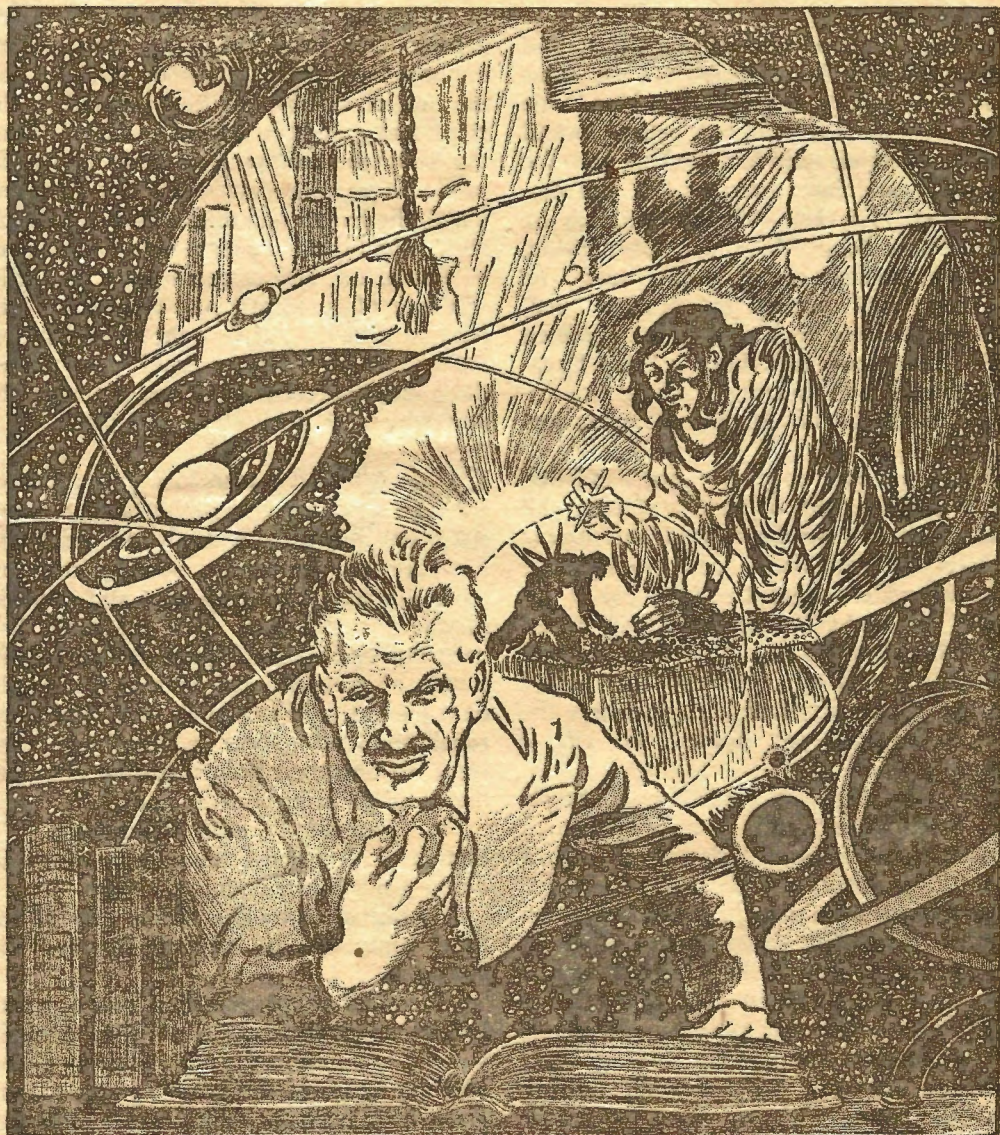
The dazzling danger of . . .

"The Shining Land"

by Edmond Hamilton

Blood From a Stone

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN



*Only one sort of illness comes and goes thusly, and evils
other than germs bring it on*

THE doctor told John Thunstone that nothing was wrong with him, and for the time they were together in the examining room it was appar-

ently true; but Thunstone had felt dizzy and faint as he entered, and as he left he had to call on the final ounce of power in his big body to keep from falling on the sidewalk.

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

"This tells me what I had to know," he assured himself. "Only one sort of illness comes and goes so conveniently for those who hate me. And evils other than germs bring it on."

A taxi returned him to his hotel, and during the ride he mastered his weakness of limb enough to enter the lobby and ride up in the elevator without being noticed by any guests or attendants, whose impulse to help would have been useless and embarrassing. His key weighed a ton as he unlocked the door of his suite. Once inside, he leaned against the jamb as though he had been shot through the body. Then, walking leadenly to his desk, he fumbled out a worn, dingy little book entitled *Egyptian Secrets* and bearing, perhaps inaccurately the name of Albertus Magnus and author.

Inside the back cover his own hand had jotted down a sort of index. Under the heading *Persons bewitched and punishment of sorcerers* were listed some twenty page numbers. He sought the first, but it included an invocation to something called "bedgoblin," which he did not feel like performing just then. Instead he leafed through to the fifty-fourth page, where the third paragraph was headed *To cite a witch*.

"Take an unglazed earthen pot," began the instructions, and John Thunstone reached for a cylindrical clay vessel with a tight-fitting cover and an Indian pattern. From various containers in his desk drawers he measured in the substances called for in the formula. Finally he plugged in the connection of an electric grill, clamped the lid tightly on the clay cylinder, and set it upside down on the glowing wires. "Summon the sorcerer," he muttered, reading from the book.

Every audible word seemed to drain away one more drop of his strength. "Summon the sorcerer before me."

He turned to page 16:

*When a Man or Beast is Plagued
by Goblins or Ill-Disposed People*

Go on Friday or Golden Sunday, ere the sun rise in the East, to a hazelnut bush. Cut a stick therefrom with a sympathetic weapon, by making

three cuts above the hand toward the rise of the sun, in the name of . . .

Thunstone numbly congratulated himself in following these instructions some years before. His head swam, his eyes seemed oppressed by alternate flashes of light and blotches of gloom, but he staggered to the closet and groped in it for a package. Tearing away the wrapping of stout paper, he produced a rough-trimmed piece of hazel wood, the length and thickness of a walking stick. As his hand grasped its thicker end, he felt better, and turned toward the grill.

Vapor of some sort rose around his clay jar. In it he saw, or thought he saw, movement. As he walked toward that part of the room, his feet steadier and stronger, the moving object grew large and plain.

SOMEWHERE a man in a gray gown or robe was busy at a rough table. Thunstone saw him, like a dimly-cast image on a motion picture screen, bending over his work, his hands shifting here and there in nimble manipulation. On the table had been outlined a little figure at full length, a man of powerful proportions that might be copied after Thunstone's own. The gray-robed one held a sheaf of sharp metal slivers, thrusting their points, one by one, into the pictured arms, throat, body.

"A Shonokin," said Thunstone. "I thought that. And I thought he would be doing just what he is doing. Now—"

His big hand took a firmer grip of the hazel cane, and he stepped forward and swung it.

The wood swept into the cloud of vapor and the image there cast. It swished through, without seeming to disturb the misty cloud, and the figure in the gown sprang convulsively back from the table. A face came into view at the top of the gown, a face framed in longish black hair, with sharp fine features. The mouth opened as if to cry out, a hand lifted, and Thunstone struck through the vapor again.

The figure cowered. Its arms crossed in front of the face, trying to ward off an attack that must have seemed incomprehensible. The hands were frail and lean, and the third fingers longer than the middle fingers.

With increasing strength and precision, Thunstone lashed and smote. He saw the gowned body going down now, and poked it once, as with a sword-point. Finally he swept his stick at the reflected table-top and saw the slivers flying from their lodgments in the outlined body there. Stepping back, he turned off his electric grill. The vapor vanished instantly, and with it the images. Thunstone drew a deep, grateful breath of air. He was no longer weak, unsteady or blurred in his mind.

His first act was to open his pen-knife, cut a tally notch in the hazel stick. Carefully he rewrapped it, and carefully he stowed it away. A weapon that has defeated enchantment once is doubly effective in defeating it again—that is a commonplace of sorcery. He sat at the desk and from the top drawer drew the sheets of paper on which he was writing, as he found it out, all that could be said about the strange things called Shonokins.

"Their insistence upon an ancestry far more ancient and baleful than anything human may have a solid foundation of fact," wrote Thunstone. "Whenever paleontologists have probed the graves of the past on this continent as thoroughly as they have probed in Europe, perhaps remains of a species resembling man, though interestingly not man, may be turned up to support the Shonokin claims. More and more do I incline to believe that here in America once lived such things, developing their own culture and behavior—just as in Europe fifty thousand years ago lived the Neanderthal race, also non-human as we know humans (not that the first Shonokins were Neanderthaloid or like any other ancient manlike creature yet discovered in fossil)."

"And, just as the Neanderthals were wiped out in some unthinkable desperate warfare with the first invading *homo sapiens*, so the ancestors of the Red Indian race must have swept away the fathers of the Shonokins—though not all of them. It would have been a war horrible beyond thought, with no sparing of vanquished enemies at the end. Somehow, a few survivors escaped, and our evidence is the existence of Shonokins today. How those beaten people lived, and where, cannot be even guessed until we learn from what

place their modern children venture forth among us, in their avowed attempts to recover rule of their old domain.

"The Shonokin enchantments, or attempts at enchantments, I shall discuss at another place. What remains is to cite certain definite racial traits that set these interesting creatures apart from us as human beings. True, they resemble men at first glance. This may be deliberate imitation of some sort, and more may be said on this part of the subject when an unclad Shonokin is examined. Their heads, though habitually covered with long hair, perhaps in disguise, betray strange skull formations that betoken a brain not inferior to the human but of a much different shape. Here may be the basic reason for differences in Shonokin ethics and reactions to all things, physical and spiritual. Again, the third finger of the Shonokin hand is the longest, instead of the middle finger as with true men. To what remote ancestry this may trace is impossible to say, as even the lower beasts as we know them have in the forepaw a longer middle toe than—"

His telephone rang. It was the clerk at the desk. A gentleman wanted to see Mr. Thunstone. Might he come up?

"I'll come down," said Thunstone, rose and put away his unfinished manuscript. He left the suite, locked it carefully, and rode down in the elevator, whistling under his breath.

His visitor was lean, just shorter than Thunstone's own lofty self, and wore a long light coat and a pulled down hat. He bowed and held out a hand with a very long third finger. Thunstone failed, or pretended to fail, to see the hand.

"Come and sit in the lobby," he invited, and led the stranger to a brace of comfortable chairs in a far corner. They sat down. At once the Shonokin took off his hat and leaned his gaunt, fine face close to Thunstone.

"How much?" he demanded.

THUNSTONE leaned back, and from his pocket drew pipe and tobacco-pouch. He filled the pipe and lighted it. The Shonokin ducked his head sidewise in disgust.

"That filthy habit, learned from Amer-

ican savages!" he growled; and Thunstone remembered that tobacco mixed with herbs had been considered in old Indian days an incense to the Great Spirit and a near-fatal fumigation to evil beings. Had not Kalasup—or Kwasind or Hiawatha, whatever his real name was—sat in enjoyment of the thick tobacco-fumes in the lodge, while his attackers, the water-goblins, turned sick and vomiting? Such evidence as he, Thunstone, uncovered tended more and more to prove that all monsters and devils of Indian legend were identifiable with the Shonokins.

"How much?" said his visitor again. "We know you well enough, Thunstone, to know that you are not a slave to money. But there are other things you value. Name them."

"You want to buy me off," replied Thunstone. "Is this an admission of defeat?"

"An admission of irritation," was the reply. "Being tormented by a stinging insect, which it is irksome to brush away, one spills honey in another place to attract it."

"My sting is not drawn as easily as that," Thunstone assured him. "Your journey is for nothing. Go back and tell that to the other Shonokins. Just now I am more than irritating. Haven't I seen two of you die?"

"No more of that!" The Shonokin lifted his left hand, its long third finger extended in what Thunstone judged to be a gesture averting ill omen. No Shonokin cares even to speak of the death of his own kind.

"You used magic against me," went on Thunstone, "magic so old as to be trite—poking and piercing my likeness. Men were successfully averting that sort of sympathetic hokus-pocus as long ago as Salem witchcraft days."

"It is not the extent of our power," was the harsh reply. "But you have not answered my question. Again, how much?"

"Again, you are wasting your time. Even a Shonokin's time must be worth something to himself. Good day."

THE strange-shaped left hand dipped into a pocket of the long coat.

"I make a last attempt, Thunstone. Here is something you will find interesting."

The hand reappeared. Between its fingertips was a great glitter of light.

"Jewels? I do not even wear them," said

Thunstone, but then his eyes were fixed on the thing.

He saw it was no jewel he knew. For an instant he fancied it was a bit of phosphorescence, or some sort of lamp—but no lamp, no phosphorus, gleamed like that. Its glare possessed his whole vision, seemed to beat through his eyes and pierce his skull behind them. Like a Brahmin looking into the sun, he was blinded; like a Brahmin looking into the sun, he could not look away. "Rise," the Shonokin said, "and come with me."

Thunstone leaned in the direction of the voice, and blew out all the tobacco smoke in his lungs.

A cry, terrible and strangled, rang in his very ears, and the light seemed to flash off. There was an abrupt clink on the floor, as though a half-dollar had dropped, and he sat up, alone. The tobacco smoke hung in the air around him, a little blue misty swaddling through which he saw two figures—the scurrying long-coated Shonokin, the approaching hotel manager.

Thunstone put the pipe back in his mouth, shutting his eyes a moment to cleanse them of their blur. He would have smiled, but decided not to. The manager was questioning him.

"What happened to that man, Mr. Thunstone?"

"He was taken suddenly ill," replied Thunstone. "It's really nothing for us to worry about."

"You're all right?"

"I'm all right," nodded Thunstone.

The manager's eyes dropped floorward. "Careful! You dropped a coal from your pipe—step on it."

Thunstone, too, glanced down to a little crumb of radiance paler and brighter than any tobacco fire. "No, don't. That's a piece of cut-glass jewelry—rather skillful cutting and polishing—I'll take care of it."

He whipped the handkerchief from his breast pocket, dropped it over the glaring object and gathered it up in his big hand.

"You've cut your finger," said the manager. "There's a spot of blood on your handkerchief."

"Not my blood," Thunstone told him, "but this thing needs careful handling." With the cambric-swaddled lump still in

his hand, he levered his bulk out of the chair. "I think I'll have dinner in my suite this evening. What's good?"

AGAIN in his sitting room, Thunstone laid a china plate on his desk. Then he chose a drinking glass from the tray beside his carafe, and struck match after match, painstakingly smudging its interior. Finally he flipped the gleaming thing upon the plate and quickly covered it with the dulled glass. He was able to look at it then without agony to his eyes.

The object was the size of an almond, smoothly curved on its entire surface. Not a single facet could he detect. But its light, even though impeded by the soot on the glass, was steady and strong. He drew his shades and turned out the electric lights in the room. Still it shone, illuminating objects to the farthest walls. Inside the object was some source of radiance, steady and insistent and intense.

Muffling it still more by dropping his handkerchief over the upturned glass, Thunstone sat back, smoked and thought. After some minutes, he took up his telephone and called a number which he did not have to look up.

The woman who answered was tremendously interested in the questions Thunstone asked, and had many questions of her own. Thunstone evaded the necessity of direct replies, and finally when she recommended another informant thanked her and hung up. His second call was long distance to Boston, where a retired professor of American folklore greeted him warmly as an old friend and gave him further, more specific information, finally naming a book.

"I have that book right here," said Thunstone. "And I should have thought of the reference without bothering you. Thanks and let's see each other soon. I may have about half of a story to tell you."

He hung up again, and went to his shelf. The book he chose was slim and green, like a cheap textbook. It was John M. Taylor's *Witchcraft Delusion in Colonial Connecticut*, published in 1908 as an item of the Grafton Historical Series.

Almost idly Thunstone leafed through the restrained but fascinating account of a multiple charge of diabolism and its evi-

dence and trial, almost forgotten today though it made grim history full thirty years before the more familiar Salem incidents. Chapter 10 began with notes on the trial of Goodwife Knapp in New Haven during May of 1654, a trial that included evidence by a dozen neighbors and ended with the defendant's death on the gallows. But it was not the adventures of Goodwife Knapp so much as those of a witness, Mary Staple, Staplyes, or Staplies, that drew Thunstone's attention:

... she, ye said Knapp, voluntarily, without any occasion given her, said that goodwife Staplyes told her, the said Knapp, than an Indian brought vnto her, the said Staplyes, two little things brighter then the light of the day, and told the said goodwife Staplyes they were Indian gods, as the Indian called ym; and the Indian withall told her, the said Staplyes, if she would keep them, she would be so big rich, all one god, and that the said Staplyes told the said Knapp, she gaue them again to the said Indian, but she could not tell whether she did so or no.

Thunstone savored the quaint spelling and syntax as he read. "... so big rich, all one god ..." What did that mean? He turned two more pages, the evidence of one Goodwife Sherwood, and a story set down at fourth hand—the same story as before:

... goodwife Baldwin whispered her in the eare and said to her that goodwife Knapp told her that a woman in ye towne was a witch and would be hanged within a twelue moneth, and would confess herselfe a witch and cleere her that she was none, and that she asked her how she knew she was a witch, and she told her she had receiued Indian gods of an Indian, wch are shining things, wch shine lighter then the day. Then this depont asked goodwife Knapp if she had said so, and she denied it; goodwife Baldwin affirmed that she did, but Knapps wife againe denied it and said she knowes no woman in the towne that is a witch, nor any woman that hath received Indian gods, but she said there was an Indian

at a womans house and offered her a couple of shining things, but the woman neuer told her she took them, but was afraide and ran away . . .

There was more beyond of Mary Staplies. The book called her a "light woman," shrewd and shrewish, who spoke in Good-wife Knapp's defense. Later she too was on trial and released, and her husband sued her accusers. She did not sound timid, by all accounts, yet on her own showing she had run fearfully from the "Indian" who offered her something shining brighter than daylight.

"Shonokins look like Indians," muttered Thunstone, "if you do not notice their third fingers."

He took time to feel sorry for the Puritan elders, not versed in demonology and not even well versed in grammar or law, who were faced with whatever faced them three hundred years ago.

Well, then: The wife of a New England colonist had fled refusing from a bright talisman that would make her "big rich." He, Thunstone, was in possession of such a thing. The Shonokin had fled this time, losing his charm—or had he? Was this, perhaps, a device to make Thunstone accept a bribe or wage?

Thunstone laid down the book and raised the handkerchief. There was a fleck of blood on it, as the manager had said; and on the dish, too, seeping from under the imprisoning glass. Within, the shining object seemed to float, like a gleaming bit of ice on a dark sea.

Thunstone took from a cabinet some chemical vessels, tubes and flasks of liquid. Carefully he secured a portion of the blood, diluted it, made frowning tests. He wound up shaking his head over the precipitation in his solution.

Blood, yes. Mammalian, surely. Human, no. What creature could be matched with that blood he could not say. Perhaps no scientist could say. He felt his eyes drawn again to the thing under the glass.

It was no longer a jewel, or anything like a jewel. In the little wallow of blood lay a skull the size of his thumb, pallid instead of glaring, its cranium shaped strangely, bulging here and pinched in there. Its

black eye-sockets seemed to meet his gaze and challenge it. Its wee, perfect jawbone stirred on its hinge, and two rows of perfect, pointed little teeth parted, then snicked together as if in hunger or menace.

THUNSTONE watched, as closely as when the Shonokin had first dipped the mystery from his pocket, but with all his defenses, mental and spiritual, up. Skulls of any size and shape must not frighten him, he decided. And—his memory flashed back to the Indian tales of Kalaspup—magical skulls had been employed before this by Shonokins against mankind, and had been defeated.

It was only the size of a thumb, anyway. No, a trifle larger, the size of an egg. A big egg. And the glass that covered it was smaller than Thunstone had thought, the skull-appearance crowded it.

As Thunstone gazed, the jawbone moved, the teeth gnashed, a second time. The movement stirred the glass, tilted and upset it. The glass rolled to the floor, broke with a muffled clash of fragments. The egg-sized skull was suddenly orange size. Its sockets were no longer dark but glowed greenly, as with some sort of phosphorescent rot. With a waggle of its jawbone it hunched itself from the plate, a little nearer to Thunstone. Yet again its teeth, big enough to show their pointed formation, snapped hungrily.

Thunstone argued with himself that worse things than this had come to him in the past, that a skull so small would be easily crushed—but already it was bigger, bigger still. It flipped over, rolled from the table, swam through the air at him. As it snapped its jaws, he batted it away, palm outward, as if playing handball. The thing was as cold as a flying snowball, and as he deflected it, it almost sank its sharp teeth into his finger. It struck a wall, bounced and caromed back, so that he ducked only just in time. The wall where it had touched so briefly bore a spatter of blood. On its new course the skull flew into the bedroom, and Thunstone pulled the door shut.

At once something was bumping, showing, demanding entrance to the parlor. The panels of the door creaked, but held. The blows grew heavier, more insistent. Was

the thing growing still more—would it grow and grow, to the size of a boulder, a table, a house? Thunstone, eyes on the closed door, mustered his wits for something new in defense. He thought quickly of the Connecticut visitation of terror, of witnesses at the witch-trials who had spoken of enchantments that smacked of hypnotism or hallucination and of grimmer things—"firy eies" with no head to contain them, and a brief glimpse of something "with a great head and wings and noe boddy and all black." Well, if Shonokins had not triumphed there, they would not triumph here.

The knockings had ceased, and there was a questing flash of light at the lower chink of the door, then something began slowly to pour out.

Thunstone thought at first it was some slow, pale-grey liquid, but it held its shape. The forepart of a flat, ugly skate or ray sometimes steals into view like that from hiding in shallow water—a blunt point like a nose, a triangle of pale tissue as flat as though hammered down. This trembled a bit, as if exploring the air by smell or feel. It came out more, and more.

IT WAS not a flattened skull, for bone would have splintered; but had a skull been modeled in softness, then pressed as thin as paper, it might be like that. It still had a jointed jaw, the semblance of needle teeth, and eye-sockets that looked up at Thunstone with a deep glow. The glow was more knowledgeable than menacing. Thunstone saw no sign of the effort to terrify which characterizes most attacks by things natural or supernatural. It thought it had him, and that there would be little or no trouble about doing what it wanted to do with him. Those flattened jaws opened, and he could see the inner bare bones of them.

It slid out, out, thin and broad as a bathmat. Thunstone's great hand fell on the back of a chair, and he brought this forward, as a trainer offers a chair to a truculent lion in a cage. The teeth closed on a hardwood leg and bit off the tip of it like a bit of celery. A little waggle of the flat muzzle cleared away the splinters. With a sort of protozoic surge, it began to clear of the chink under the floor. Its forepart swelled

as if to regain its skull-shape, a shape that would be larger than a bushel.

There was a door behind Thunstone, a door to the outer corridor; but Thunstone does not run from evil. He knows that others have turned their backs, and what has happened to those others. He tossed the whole chair for the teeth to catch and mangle, dropped back as far as the closet and made a quick snatching motion inside for an ebony cane. With this he thrust, swordsmanslike, at the enemy, and thought it checked—perhaps because the ferrule of the stick was of silver, abhorrent to black magic. He gained a moment to grab with his other hands at the bookshelf and throw books like stones at the thing.

THOSE were valuable books, some of them irreplaceable, others old friends that had nourished his mind and stood his allies in moments almost as unlucky as this. Thunstone felt like cursing as the skull, now lifting itself three-dimensional against the bedroom door, caught in its mouth and ripped to shreds a first edition of Thompson's *Mysteries and Secrets of Magic*. Spence's heavy *Encyclopedia of Occultism*, enough to smash a skull, bounced importantly from the misshapen brain-case. The thing was lifting now, lifting into the air in a slow, languid flight, like a filling balloon, to drift toward him. Its jaw dropped, exposing a mouth that could take his head at one gulp.

"Not this time!" Thunstone defied it, in a voice he wished was not so hysterical, and threw yet another book. This came open as it flew through the air, smiting the noseless face and dropping on its back, wide-spread, just in front.

The skull, too, dropped back and down. Thunstone could have sworn that its face-bones writhed, like frightened flesh. It seemed to turn away.

He stood there, breathing as if from labors that had exhausted even his giant body, and saw it sag, spread, flatten. It wanted to creep back the way it had come.

"No!" he yelled at it again, and, stooping, caught the edge of the carpet. Frantically he bundled the skull and the book together.

It took both his brawny hands to hold

that package together, for what was inside thrashed and churned as convulsively as a great cat in a bag. Thunstone hung on, it was all he could do, and brought his thick knee into play, bearing down. That skull had grown so large and abhorrent—but not quite to bushel size. It was more pumpkin size now—or did he imagine it was like a football, the size of an ordinary human head? It still strove and wallowed, straining for freedom. A human head of those dimensions would be dwarfed, really; perhaps a child's; perhaps a monkey's.

"It's shrinking," he growled exultantly. "Trying to get out that way."

Now it did not struggle at all, or it was too small to make its struggles felt. Thunstone clung to his improvised trap, counting to thirty, and dared to let the fabric fall open.

The skull was gone. The blinding bright jewel was there, in a fold of the rug as far removed as possible from the still open book.

Thunstone smiled. Deliberately and with all his strength, he set his heel upon the glow and ground down. He felt disintegration, as of very old fire-weakened brick. A whiff of bad odor came up, and was gone. The glow departed, and when he took away his foot, there was a blood-stain and nothing more.

Breathing deeply once again, Thunstone picked up the book. It was his *Egyptian Secrets* that, earlier in the day, had shown him a way to another victory. By some chance it had fallen open to the sixty-second page:

A Most Excellent Protection

Write the following letters upon a scrap of paper:

Thunstone read them, a passage so sea-

soned with holy names that it might have been a prayer instead of a spell. And, finally:

Only carry the paper with you; and you will then perceive that no enchantment can remain in the room with you.

Thunstone closed the book, then reopened it to the quaint preface which promised that "to him who properly esteems and values this book, and never abuses its teachings, will not only be granted the usefulness of its contents, but he will also attain everlasting joy and blessing." The thought came that to some scholars such tomes of power were considered in themselves to be evil. But is not every weapon what the wielder makes it? He decided to disallow the element of chance in the falling open of *Egyptian Secrets* to the very passage that had won his late struggle.

Someone was knocking at the door. Thunstone started violently, then recovered himself.

"Yes?"

"Room service, Mr. Thunstone. You said you'd be dining in your suite?"

"Not for three-quarters of an hour," said Thunstone. "I'll telephone down."

"Right." The man outside was walking away.

Thunstone poured himself a drink from a bottle of brandy. It tingled in his throat. Then he stripped off his jacket, rolled the sleeves back from his broad forearms, and from the bathroom fetched a broom, towels and a pail of water.

Beginning the task of cleaning his own room, he whistled a tune to himself, a tune old and cheerful. And when he had finished whistling it, he whistled it all over again. He had never felt better in his life.



"THE WATCHER FROM THE SKY" by AUGUST DERLETH

JULY

Weird Tales

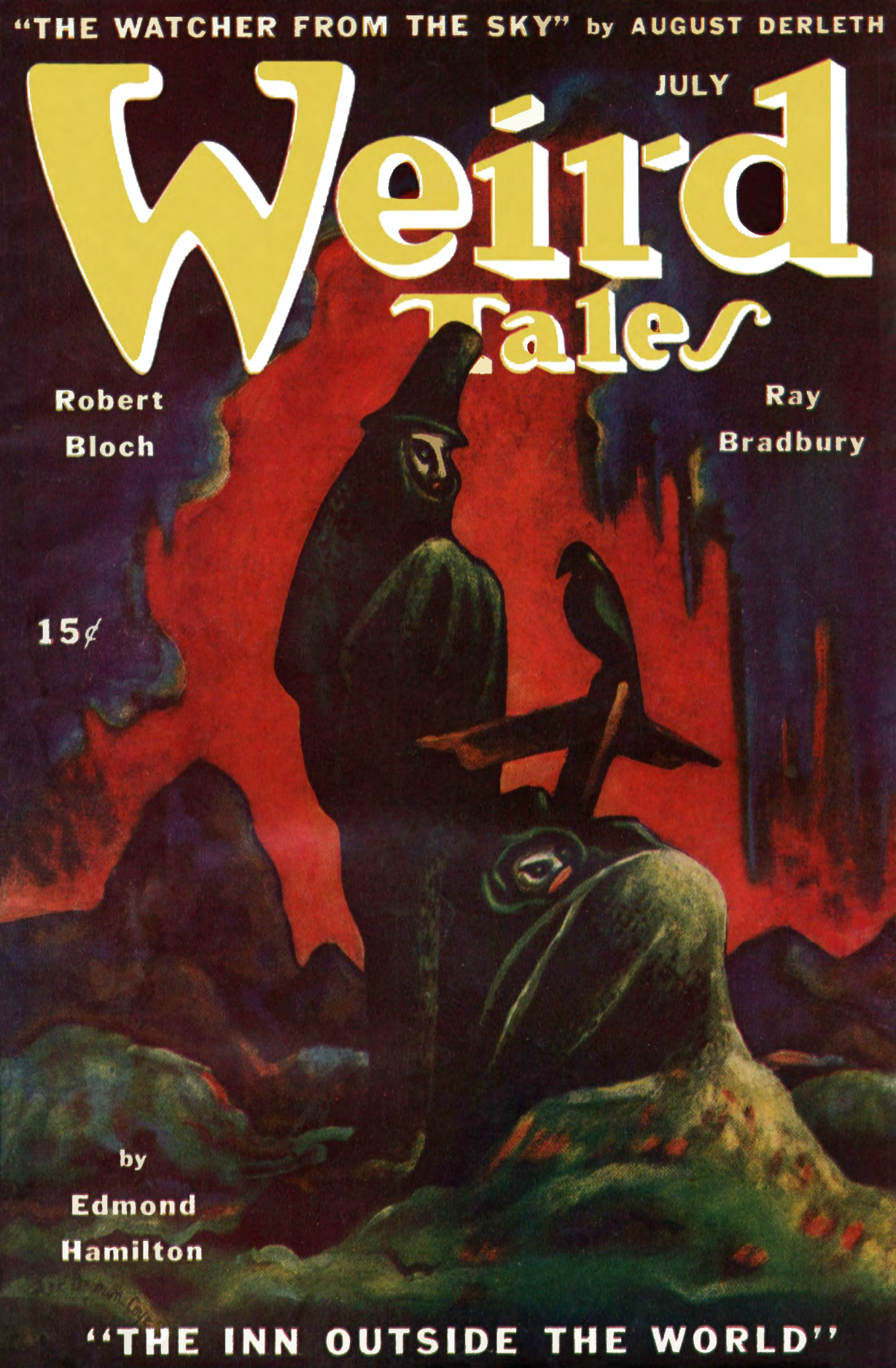
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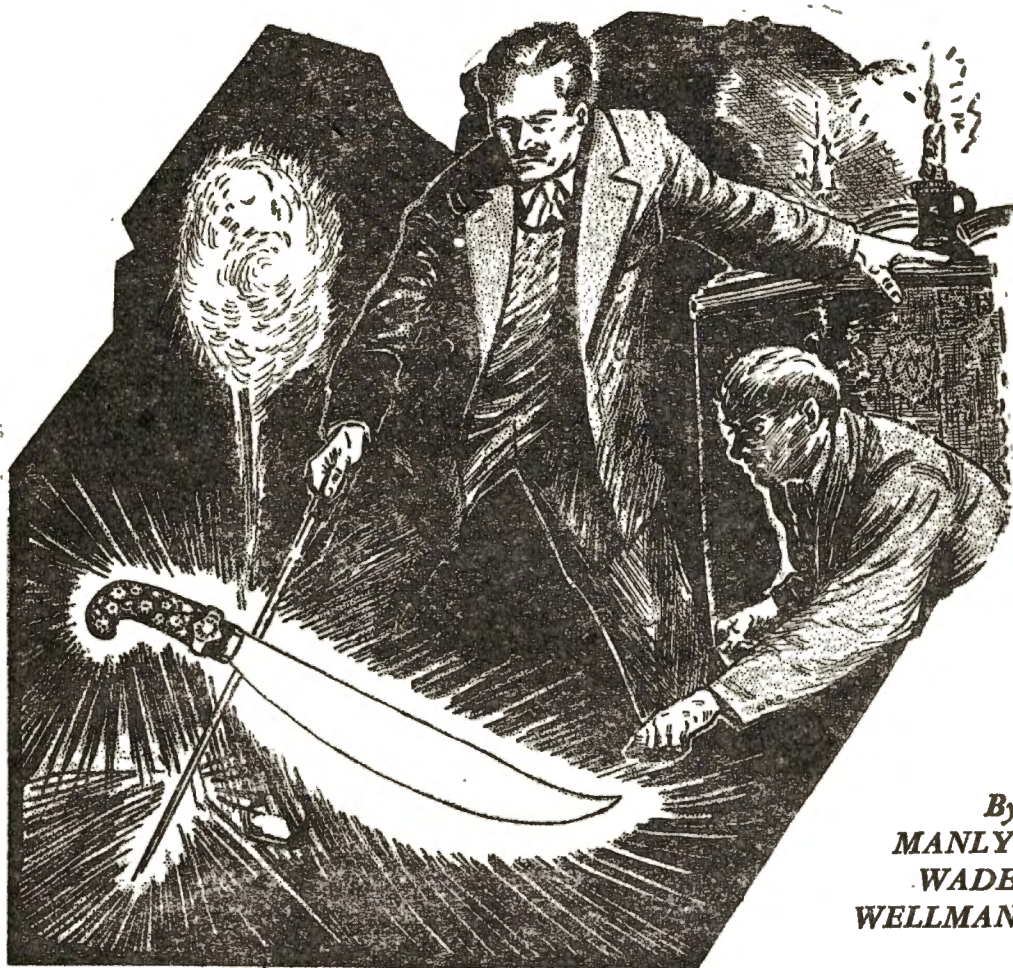
15¢

by
Edmond
Hamilton

"THE INN OUTSIDE THE WORLD"



The Dai Sword



By
MANLY
WADE
WELLMAN

“LOTS of shops, lots of private collectors would like to bid on it,” the little straw-tinted man assured Thunstone, “but I felt that you—the sort of man you are, with occult knowledge and interests—ought to have first refusal.”

In his comfortable chair by the club window, Thunstone was almost as tall sitting down as was the straw-tinted man standing

up. Thunstone’s long broad hand took the pipe from under his clipped dark mustache, Thunstone’s wide gloomy eyes studied the curved sword that had been laid on the magazine stand. From the chair opposite, young Everitt was leaning forward to look, too.

“Arabian sword?” asked young Everitt. He liked to slide himself into private discussions. His father had been a director

... and a Dai blade must never be drawn except for the shedding of blood

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

of this club, and an acquaintance of Thunstone. Young Everitt wanted to be a personal friend, or anyway said so. Thunstone was slow about admitting men and women to his personal friendship. He hated to be prejudiced about things like eyes being too close together, but he was. And young Everitt's bright, small eyes were very close together indeed.

"It is a sword from Nepal," the straw-tinted man was informing Everitt. "A sword of the warrior class, peculiar to the Dais. They are an offshoot, a schism one might say, of the Gurkhas."

"I thought Gurkhas were those little pickle things," smirked Everitt at Thunstone, who smiled back but not very broadly. "Why is this sword worth so much?"

"Because it is a thing of ritual," replied the straw-tinted man. "Because there are so few such swords ever offered for sale. Because," and his pale little forefinger tapped the wire-bound hilt, "it is set with precious jewels."

At the word "jewels," young Everitt bounded eagerly out of his chair and bent to look more closely.

"Jewels, all right," he agreed, as if he had been requested to pass judgment. "Not awfully good ones, though. There's a flaw in the ruby. And those emeralds, I'm not very wrought up about them." He scowled, and his close-set eyes seemed to crowd each other even more. "The one on the pommel, the dull one set in silver—what is it?"

"A Dai stone," said the straw-tinted man. His eyes, which were also straw-tinted, turned to seek Thunstone's. He did not seem to like Everitt.

"Dai—dye?" echoed Everitt. "You ought to dye it, some brighter color." Again he chuckled over his own pun. "Never heard of one."

"From the name of that stone the Dais take the name of their sect. . . . I wouldn't draw the sword, not now."

But Everitt had already cleared the blade from its scabbard of brass-studded leather. The steel shone as with frantic scrubbing and polishing. Thunstone, returning his pipe to his mouth, fancied that he could mirror his own square face in that brightness. The curve of the blade was double-

edged, not only on the outer arc but the inner curve, which was almost as abrupt as that of a fish hook. And the point itself looked deadly sharp, like the sting of a wasp.

"I am afraid," said Thunstone gently, "that I'm not a good prospect for the sale. May I ask where you got such a specimen?"

The straw-colored man shook his head. He might have been deploring Thunstone's refusal, or declining to tell the history of his acquisition. "I had hoped," he said after a moment, "that you would be interested in the history of the Dais."

"I know a little about the Dais," Thunstone replied, still gently. "Not much, but a little. I am not of their faith, and I have no use for so peculiar a part of it as a Dai sword."

EVERITT suddenly squealed out an oath, not proper language in that quiet and conservative club room. Still holding the drawn sword in one hand, he furiously wrung the fingers of the other.

"I was just going to put it back in the sheath," he told them, "and—but you can see for yourself!"

Had he been years younger, you would have said that Everitt pouted. He thrust his hand under Thunstone's nose. The quivering thumb had been punctured at the center of the ball, and blood trickled in a shiny thread. Thunstone meditated that no artificial scarlet can come near the brightness of fresh blood. Drawing his hand back, Everitt sucked the thumb scowlingly, like a bad-tempered baby.

"Of course," said the straw-tinted man, taking the sword and sheathing it without mishap, "the Dais would find that accident a fortunate one for you."

"Fortunate?" repeated Everitt thickly, past the thumb in his mouth.

It was Thunstone who said: "As I understand it, a Dai blade must never be drawn except for the shedding of blood. The sect insists that bloodless drawing is the worst of ill luck."

"And, should they draw for polishing or sharpening only, or for exhibition only," amplified the straw-tinted man, "they will prick themselves deliberately, just as you did just now inadvertently, to avert the ill

luck." He weighed the sheathed weapon in his hand. "I'm sorry, Mr. Thunstone, that you are not interested. As I suggested before, perhaps I should show it to a collector or—"

"Wait," said Everitt.

He had taken his thumb out of his mouth. His narrow-set eyes watched a new bead of blood as it slowly formed on the wet skin. When he spoke again, he sounded ill-humored. "If Thunstone doesn't want the thing, maybe I do. How much for it, Mister?"

Thunstone, refilling his pipe, watched. The straw-tinted man remained silent for a moment. Finally he named a sum, and he sounded as though he were trying to ask too much. Everitt snorted.

"That's pretty steep," he said. "What about—"

"I cannot bargain."

"Then I'll take it." With his unwounded hand, Everitt produced a wallet of dark brown leather, and opened it. "Prefer cash, do you." He flipped out some bills. "Keep the odd six dollars for your trouble in coming up here."

"I never accept tips," the straw-tinted man said tonelessly. From his own wallet, a foreign-looking fold made to accommodate notes of another size and shape than American money, he counted out a five and a one. He gazed for a moment at the sword, at Thunstone, and at Everitt. He bowed, or rather nodded, like a toy with a moveable head.

"May I wish you good luck with this purchase," he said, and passed the sword to Everitt. "It is very rare and curious in this part of the world. Thank you."

When he had departed, Everitt looked sharply at Thunstone.

"I suppose," he said, "you want to know why I bought this little gimmick."

"I don't believe in requiring explanations from people," replied Thunstone.

"Well, I'm a rationalist and an empiricist," announced Everitt, who was neither. "I'll show you, and show everybody, that this isn't any magic tool—it's just so much metal and bad jewelry, put together in a funny shape." He studied his thumb again. "The bleeding's already stopped. This time I won't be so clumsy."

Picking up the sword, he drew it with a rather stagey flourish. Even in Everitt's fist, unschooled to swords, it balanced perfectly. Its blade again caught silvery lights. Thunstone speculated as to what alloy had gone to its smelting and forging. Everitt smiled rather loftily, and dipped the curved point back into the sheath, smacking the blade smartly home. An instant later he had dropped the sword, swearing more loudly than before.

"I've cut myself again!" he cried sulkily.

MR. MAHINGUPTA, when visited that evening by John Thunstone, made him welcome in his study as he would have welcomed less than ten other Occidentals. Mr. Mahingupta was smaller even than the straw-tinted man, with a youthful slimness and spryness utterly deceptive; for he was old and wise, nobody this side of the seas knew quite how old and how wise. His brilliant eyes slanted a bit in the finest of brown faces, and his clothes were exquisitely tailored without extremity of cut. He offered cigarettes and a little silver cup of brandy that must have been quite as old as he himself.

"To call the Dais an offshoot of the Gurkha cult is pure ignorance," he answered Thunstone's query, in accents more Oxonian than Herbert Marshall's. "We Gurkhas aren't a cult at all, sir. In faith we are Hindu, and in blood mixed Aryan and Mongol. As Rajputs—men of the warrior caste—we maintain a certain individuality, of course. You know that Gurkha record in many wars." Mr. Mahingupta sighed, perhaps remembering campaigns and stricken fields of his distant youth. "Far too many people misunderstand the East and, misunderstanding, loudly persuade others to misunderstand also."

"Then there is no different quality to the way the Gurkha worship?" prompted Thunstone. "Different, that is, from orthodox Hinduism?"

"The difference is in descent and training only," Mr. Mahingupta assured him. "In the remote beginning, great Brahma fathered the various castes. From his mouth issues the first of the priests, hence their wisdom. From his right arm was born Shatria, first of my warrior forbears, hence our

strength. Merchants sprang from his thighs, laborers and mechanics from his feet."

Thunstone had heard all that years before. "The Dais," he pursued. "Are they also of warrior caste?"

Mr. Mahingupta's mouth- corners turned up briefly and thinly. "Who can say whence they came? In Nepal exist many of them, in towns close to the Himalayas. For all I know, or anyone knows, they may descend from the abominable ice-devils. As to their claims of power I may not judge. I do not like them, and neither would you, I hope."

"I told you of the Dai jewel in the hilt of the sword. What is it?"

"Jewels," said Mr. Mahingupta, "should be cleanly dug up from under ground, not evoked by magical formula. I do not have patience with such strange chemistry or alchemy or whatever. From what I hear, every Dai stone is of artificial origin, or anyway of preternatural origin. I saw but one in my life." The lips pursed, still harshly. "It served as the single eye of an excessively unpleasant little statue. I dug it out as a gesture of defiance toward those who worshipped the thing. This happened more than your lifetime ago, but see."

He extended a slender, delicate hand. The brown forefinger was crooked as from a bad fracture, and seamiy scarred as from deep burns. That was all Mr. Mahingupta said about the adventure, and probably not even Everitt would have urged him to say more. Mr. Mahingupta lifted his brandy cup.

"Though I despise and denounce the Dai worship and all it claims," he went on, "yet I am afraid that the unhappy young man you mention is as good as dead now, for his idiocies. Be comforted that civilization will advance unhampered by such a clumsy fool and boor. I regret, my dear friend, that I can help you no further."

"You mean that you can't," asked Thunstone, "or that you won't?"

"Both," said Mr. Mahingupta.

THE night was not too far spent when Thunstone left Mr. Mahingupta, and he called on young Everitt.

Everitt's quarters were what might stand

for the popular idea of a bachelor apartment. It was a place in the eighties, with a large living room, two bedrooms to one side, and a kitchen with a long-idle range, an electric refrigerator, and rows and rows of liquor bottles. On the walls of the living room hung various consciously male paraphernalia—crossed foils, boxing gloves, hockey sticks, none of which Everitt knew how to use. Higher up were fastened the stuffed heads of animals Everitt had not himself killed. Everitt wore a wine-dark robe with a luxuriantly folded white scarf, and greeted Thunstone with a cordiality over-warmed by drink.

"So you found the way up here at last," he said. "What'll you have? Cocktail? Swizzle? Name it and I'll fix it."

"Nothing, thanks," demurred Thunstone, who would rather savor in retrospect the brandy Mr. Mahingupta had given him. "I was in the neighborhood, and I thought I'd see how your hand was doing. That second cut was pretty bad."

Everitt drew from the pocket of his robe the hand in question. It was taped over the ball of the thumb, and most of the palm was swaddled in criss-crossed gauze.

"The doctor asked me if I'd been bitten," he said. "It got kind of inflamed or infected—Lord! How he hurt me with that germicide stuff!" Everitt bit his lip at the memory.

Thunstone looked closely at the hand. The fingers were flushed and a bit swollen, but he could not judge if they were dangerously sore. Everitt slid the hand back into his pocket, and nodded at the wall.

"Anyway, there it hangs. How does it look?"

He had tacked up a square of figured Indian cloth, and on this was displayed the Dai sword, drawn and slanted across its own sheath. Again Thunstone remarked the silvery glow of the metal, almost like the glow of great heat. Thumb tacks held blade and sheath in place, and one of these at the pommel was red. No, that was the stone that had seemed so dull in the club. It gave off a color-tint both flushed and gloomy like—well, like a drop of blood gone a little stale.

"That jewel on the hilt does catch the light funny, doesn't it?" said Everitt,

watching Thunstone. "And I thought it was dull."

Thunstone took a step nearer the wall. "You drew it again, I see. Maybe you're wise not to return it to the sheath."

"I think it looks better displayed like that," explained Everitt, lighting a cigarette. "I'll sheathe it again, though, any time I feel like it. Right now, if you like, just to show you I'm not afraid."

"I wish," said Thunstone, "that a man I know were here to look at the thing. His name's E. Hoffmann Price."

"The writer?" Everitt's scorn for all who wrote was manifest.

"He's more than that," replied Thunstone. "For one thing, he's an accomplished fencer and understands swords thoroughly. He's likewise a recognized student of the Orient, and as for occult matters, he's an expert."

"Bring him around some time if you like," granted Everitt, "but don't let him think he could buy the thing back from me. At first I felt I was overpaying; but didn't somebody or other say that it isn't what you pay for anything that sets its value—it's whether you still want it after you've bought it—"

"Apparently you still want it, then," suggested Thunstone.

"Wouldn't be without it," Everitt assured him airily. "And, just to show that I'm perfectly ready to sheathe it at any time—"

He extended a hand toward the hilt with the flushed jewel. At that instant the doorbell rang.

Everitt went to open the door. There stood the straw-tinted man.

"I am sorry to call so late," he greeted them, "but I wish to rectify a mistake. It seems," and he gulped, "that I had no right to sell that Dai sword."

HIS straw tint was paler than it had been, as though straw had been coated with frost. His eyes caught the sheen of the weapon on the wall. "There it is," he said eagerly. "May I return the money and have it back?"

"You may not," Everitt told him.

"I say that I should not have sold it."

"You've found that out a trifle late," Everitt reminded, mixing himself a new

drink. "Anyway, the sale's completed. Thunstone here was a witness to the transaction. I paid you money, which you put in your pocket, and that was that."

"I'll pay you a difference of—"

"No," said Everitt.

"I'll double the sum—"

"If it's worth that much for you to buy back, it's worth that much for me to hang onto." Everitt grinned and squinted. "I don't need money, Mister, but I've a liking for the sword."

The straw-tinted man lifted his shoulders wearily. Very narrow, thin shoulders they seemed just then. He faced Thunstone appealingly. "Persuade your friend," he begged.

"Thunstone knows that I won't change my mind," said Everitt. "Some people call me stubborn, some that I'm just determined. "Take your choice, but I won't sell you your sword again. If you stole it, or otherwise acted illegally, that's your funeral, not mine. Now, how about a drink? Drinking's a good way to end any argument."

The straw-tinted man shook his head and turned back to the door.

"Wait," Thunstone called to him. "I'm coming with you." To Everitt he said, "promise me that you'll leave that Dai sword alone until I see you again."

"I'll make no such idiotic promise," snickered Everitt. His manner was the sort that Thunstone was apt to resent, even violently. But the big man said no more, not even a farewell. He followed the straw-tinted stranger out and down to the street. It was a fine night, without a moon.

"I suggest that you tell me enough to help me save Everitt," ventured Thunstone after a little silence. But the straw-tinted man shook his head slowly.

"I dare not," he almost moaned. "I'm in a sad enough situation as it is."

"Have the Dais been after you?"

"I know of no Dais in this hemisphere."

"That doesn't answer my question," insisted Thunstone. "Have they been after you? . . . You don't answer, which means that they have."

"I do not deny it," said the straw-tinted man. "Once among the Dais, you are forever touched with something of their influence, even from a great distance. You,

sir, have been considerate of me, and I would rather not afflict you with—with what afflicts me."

"You are not a Dai?" Thunstone prompted.

"Once I might have become one. I sought out their scholars and teachers, went a little way into their lore. Why not? An American has become a lama in Tibet, which is harder by far to do. Anyway, I progressed far enough to have the sword. I had won the right to possess it, but not the right to relinquish it. That truth I realized tonight—the thought came into my heart, it was put there from somewhere far off. Now I feel doom growing near and dense around me."

He shuddered, and Thunstone steadied him with a massive hand on his shoulder.

"Come home with me," bade Thunstone.

AT THUNSTONE'S hotel, there were books to study, as usual. One was a translation by Gaster of that manuscript *Sword of Moses* which is believed by many to date from earlier than the fourth century and which has been called by Oxford scholars a connecting link between old Grecian mysteries and the magical works of the Middle Ages.

"Know that the man who wishes to use the sword must free himself for three days from accidental pollution," read Thunstone, "and from every unclean thing . . ."

Like the ceremony of knighthood, he mused as he read, wherein the aspiring youth must fast, bathe, pray and keep vigil before being vouchsafed the weapon which would be his badge of gentility and prowess. Were not the swords of heroes rated in the old stories as having special power and personality, even bearing names like living beings—Gram, Durandal, Excalibur? Thunstone gazed at his silent guest, wondering what sort of initiation he had undergone. Undoubtedly none that Everitt would endure.

Thunstone took a second volume, the *Key of Solomon*, as translated by "H. G. on April 8, 1572." It was a sizeable work divided into ten parts, and plainly had been well thumbed before Thunstone had gained possession of it. Especially worn were the pages of the last section, entitled "*Of ex-*

periments extraordinary that be forbidden of good men."

Thunstone found references to swords from almost the first pages, and there was a sub-section of *swords and knives*.

It is necessary in operation of artes to have swords and knives and other instruments of which circles may be made and other necessary operations. . . . If swords be necessary, let them be scoured and clean from the first hour. . . .

There followed diagrams to show the "form and fashion" of such instruments. Two of the many outlines, entitled *cuttellus niger* and *cuttellus albus*, were reminiscent of the curved, double-edged Dai blade. There was mention also of other magical weapons, including lance, scimitar, sickle, dagger, poignard, and a knife called And-amco. Thunstone reached for a third book.

This, a massy tome bound in red cloth, was a beautifully printed English work, by a man whom Thunstone had often opposed and once or twice damaged. Here and there little gatherings and cults use it as a veritable bible, taking to heart its startling teachings and going through the forms of its rather pompous rituals. It is a slipshod work, containing some passages of startling beauty as well as masses of carelessly written and wordy nonsense. On the next to the last page Thunstone found what he was looking for:

. . . Let the scholar take steel, smelted according to the previous formula, and by his understanding skill beat, grind and sharpen it into a sword. Let it be engraved with the words and symbols ordained, and employed in the performance of mystries. Let none touch, save those deserving . . .

Thunstone slammed shut the book and put it away.

"So," he said aloud, "you made the weapon yourself?"

"I did," replied the straw-tinted man, with an air of tragic resignation.

"Each Dai makes his own? Even to the Dai jewel on the pommel?"

"That is given us." The desperate eyes of strange color sought Thunstone. "Do you think I sold because I needed money? No—only to rid myself of the sword and all memory of the Dais. But they know,

far off in their own country, and send me their thoughts." The eyes closed. "I hear them now. They say to return to Everitt and demand the sword—tomorrow."

"Then we did wrong to leave him to-night," said Thunstone at once, and got quickly to his feet. "Go back to him now—wait, we both go back."

He put on his hat, and from a corner took a rather heavy walking stick of Malacca, with a silver band around its balance. "This was a gift from an old friend of mine, a Judge Pursuivant," he explained. "I'm ready to go if you are."

THIS time there was no response to their ringing at Everitt's door. Thunstone pushed at the panel with the ferrule of his stick, and it creaked inward on its hinges. They walked in.

The lights were on, and showed them Everitt, lying in his crumpled robe against the wall beneath the square of cloth on which the Dai sword had hung. Quickly Thunstone strode to his side and knelt. Everitt did not move when Thunstone touched him. He was dead, with his throat slit neatly as if by a razor-sharp edge.

Clutched in Everitt's unbandaged hand was the sword, snugly set in its sheath. The stone at the pommel gleamed red and baleful as fire in mist.

"A third time he tried to sheathe it unblooded," the straw-tinted man was babbling. "The third time, as in so many cases, was the finality-time. It turned in his hand and killed him."

Thunstone put a hand toward the weapon, but the straw-tinted man was before him, snatching at the hilt. Everitt's dead hand remained closed on the sheath, and the sword came clear as the straw-tinted man pulled at it. Its blade gleamed silver-white and spotless.

"No blood on it," said Thunstone.

"Because it drinks the blood in, as sand drinks water. Only the stone shows what has happened," and a pale-tan finger tapped the pommel. "Now, how to sheathe it once more?"

The strangely colored eyes gazed calculatingly at Thunstone, who straightened his bulk and, standing erect, gazed back.

"I can explain to the police," he said.

"At least, there are certain high officials of the police who are ready to accept any explanation I care to make about anything. But that thing you hold must be disposed of quickly. I suggest that we drive into the country and bury it deeply in some field or woods." Stooping, he pulled the sheath from Everitt's inert fingers. "How shall we put it back into this?"

"It will not go in without bloodshed," the straw-tinted man said, weighing the curved sword with practised grip. "The thing has a spirit of its own. It is like the *Yan*—the devil—they say lives in that sword owned by the Fire-King. Probably you never heard of it."

"I've heard," Thunstone assured him. He held his stick horizontally across his body, right hand at the knob, left hand lightly holding it near the ferrule. "Frazer refers to it in *The Golden Bough*. Isn't that the sword owned by a ruler in the Cambodian jungle, of which it is claimed that if it is drawn the world will come to an end?"

"It may not be so powerful, but it has power, from the blood it has drunk," said the straw-tinted man. "This, too, must drink blood. Mr. Thunstone, I regret what I must do. Perhaps I need only make a slight wound, if you do not resist."

Thunstone cleared his throat harshly. "I give no blood to that thing. It has had victory enough, over you and over poor Everitt."

"You are unarmed, you cannot refuse." By a slight alteration of the position of his wrist, the straw-tinted man brought the point into line with Thunstone's broad chest. He sidled gingerly in.

Thunstone twisted the stick in his hands. The lower part seemed to slip away, baring a slim straight blade, bright as the Dai sword. He dropped both the hollow loose part and the sheath he had taken from Everitt.

"I expected something like that," smiled the straw-tinted man. "Of course, neither of us are being personal about this. Your sword cane cannot help you. This is a sword of power. It must be wetted with blood."

"Come on," invited Thunstone, his great body easily assuming the attitude of a fencer. The curved blade swept fiercely at him,

clanged against his own interposed strip of metal, and bounded back like a ball from a shutter. The straw-tinted man exclaimed, as though an electric shock had run up his arm. He fell back, reassumed position and lunged again, this time with the point.

A single movement of Thunstone's lighter blade engaged and deflected the attack.

"I too have a sword of power," he said. "I had not time to warn you, but watch."

He feinted, coaxed his opponent into trying another slash. This he parried and, before the straw-tinted man could recover, darted in his own point. It struck solidly at the pommel of the Dai sword, projecting beyond the fist that held it. There was a sharp ping, and the red-flushed jewel bounced away across the floor like a thrown marble. Next instant Thunstone had dipped his blade under, engaged again, and with a quick press and slap had beaten the heavier weapon from the straw-tinted man's grasp.

A warning jab with the point made his disarmed opponent drop back. Then, "Watch," said Thunstone again, and pointed his own blade at the fallen Dai sword.

There was responsive movement in the thing, like the furtive retreating rustle of a frightened snake. As his point approached it, it shifted on the floor, moving on the planks with a little grating tinkle. For a moment it seemed to set its point hungrily toward the straw-tinted man, but Thunstone's weapon struck it smartly, and it faced away. Like a bit of conjuror's apparatus dragged by an invisible thread on the stage, it moved, at first slowly and jerkily, then with more speed and smoothness. He

herded it painstakingly toward the fallen leather sheath.

"How—how—" the straw-tinted man was stammering in absolute incomprehension.

Urged inexorably by a last touch of Thunstone's blade, the sword seemed fairly to scurry the last distance. It slid into the sheath with an abrupt *chock*, and lay quivering.

Thunstone picked it up and laid it carefully on a table.

"My blade is silver, a great specific against black magic," he now had time to say. "Look at the inscription. It's old, a little worn, but perhaps you can make out the Latin."

The pale straw-tinted face bent to read. "*Sic pereant omnes inimici tui*," he repeated slowly. "My Latin is not as good as it might be."

"So perish all thine enemies," translated Thunstone. "From the Song of Deborah, in the book of Judges. Pursuivant said that this silver sword was forged by St. Dunstan himself, and he was able to conquer no less an enemy than Satan. Pick up the Dai stone in your handkerchief. We can bury it along with the sword."

The straw-tinted man knelt to retrieve the jewel.

"It is dull again, as though all the blood had run out of it," he said, and rose, facing Thunstone hopefully. "And I have no sense of any more thought-commands from far away. Am I free? Why do you interest yourself in matters like these?"

"I sometimes wonder," replied John Thunstone, fitting his sword cane back together.



CHARIOTS OF SAN FERNANDO by MALCOLM JAMESON

JANUARY

Weird Tales

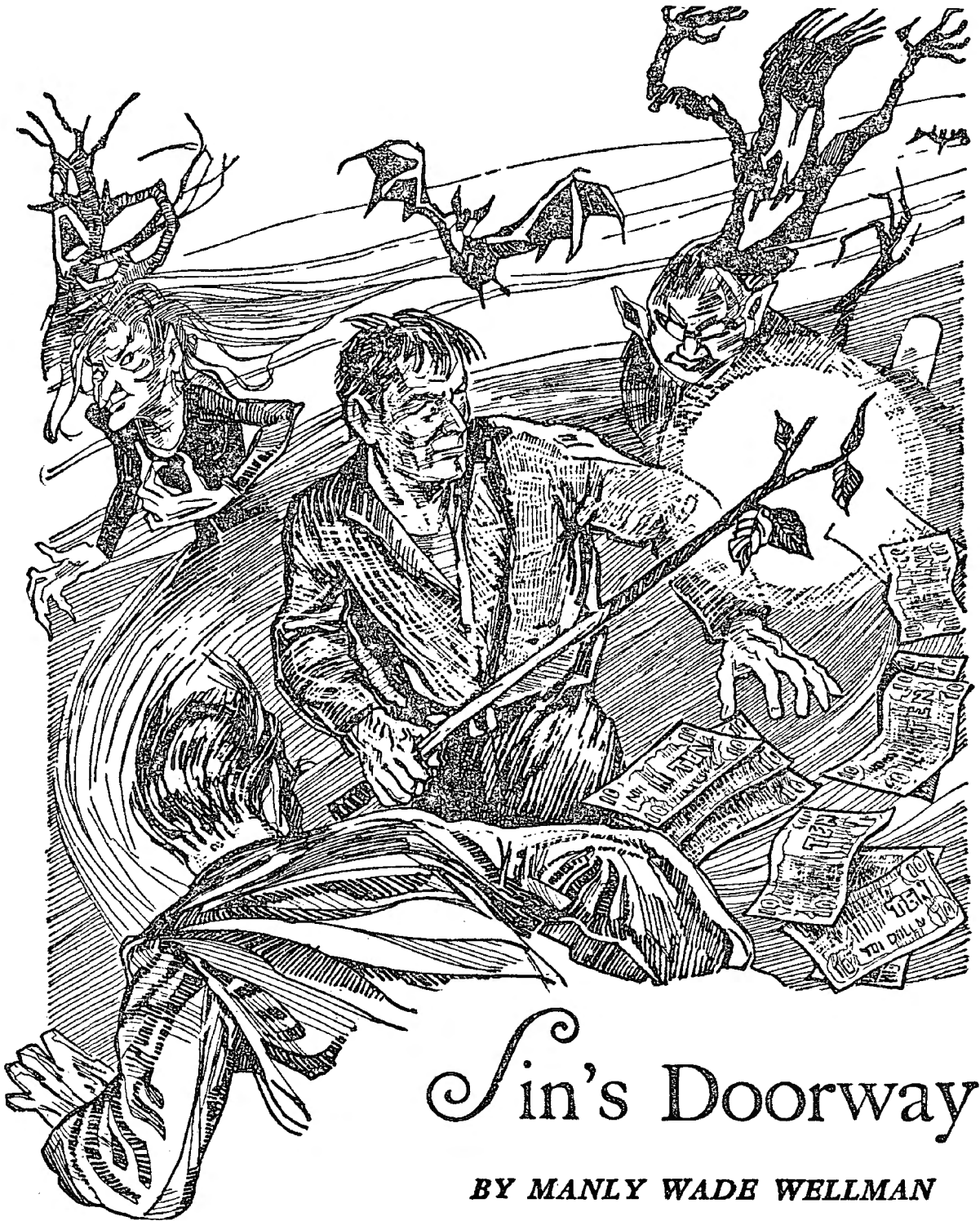
15¢



Shadow-shapes in the nightmare land of the Infinite . . .

"Kurban"

SEABURY QUINN



Sin's Doorway

BY MANLY WADE WELLMAN

... and sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

—GENESIS, IV, 7.

IN THOSE DAYS and in that part of the South I tried to keep out of county seats and other towns of any size. Sheriffs and town marshals had a way of rounding up

tattered strangers and putting them on chain gangs. That spring I followed a trail, not much more than a footway, between two hills where the live-oaks and the long-leaf pine shouldered themselves into thickets. There would be clearings in the hollows beyond, and a cabin or two of simple people. They'd recognize me, I hoped, for someone sad and hungry. I'd be invited to eat corn bread—

Heading by FRED HUMISTON



fried bacon too, if I was lucky, or a stew of squirrel or rabbit. I had not eaten since the morning before, nor very heartily then. Feeling faint, I knelt to drink from a little pencil-wide stream. When I rose, my legs were not so shaky.

Then as I tramped downhill between the path's scrub-grown borders, I heard voices singing an old hymn. Around the bend I walked, and came almost among the people.

There were twenty or twenty-five of them, overalled men, and women in homespun dresses and calico sunbonnets, and some shock-headed children. They stood bunched in front of a shabby little clapboard church,—I knew it was a church by the tacked-on steeple that housed no bell. Next the church was a grassy burying-ground, with ant-eaten

wooden headboards, fenced by stakes and rails. Nobody stood inside the fence. They all faced toward a home-made coffin of whip-sawed pine, rough and unpainted.

I hate funerals. I go to as few as I can manage. But I paused to watch this one. Nobody looked sorry or glad, only intent. Beside the coffin stood a tall mountainy man in worn black, with a grizzled chin-tuft that lengthened his hawk-like face. Perhaps Abe Lincoln would have looked like that, if Wilkes Booth had spared him for twenty more years. That was the preacher, I decided, for as the singing died he began to talk. As my eyes turned toward him, I saw two figures squatting on the ground beyond him and the coffin. For a moment I took these to be old carven images, like figure-

" . . . assume and take to thyself the sins that trouble the soul of the departed."

heads from ancient sailing vessels. They looked weathered and colorless, face, hair and clothing. One was a bewhiskered male, the other a wrinkled old female. Neither moved, not even their eyes blinked. But their backs were tense, as though slighting the church. I know Southern folklore, and remembered a bit; witches, the servants of devils, always turn their backs to the house of God.

"It was the will and prayer of Levi Brett, our departed—brother—"

The preacher had stumbled over that word as if he had disliked to speak it. "His will," he went on, "that we call at his burial for someone to eat his sins."

I pricked up my ears at that. Sin-eating—the old English had believed in it. There was something about it in *Precious Bane*, a delightful novel I hoped to read again if ever I came among books, and had money to buy them. For pay or for gratitude, a living person assumes the burden of sin borne by a dead one. Then a soul is free to enter heaven, and the sin-eater has years of life in which to expiate that assumed obligation. Once or twice I had heard rumors, just rumors, that some back-country Americans kept the custom.

The preacher paused again, watching his companions. Nobody stirred, except a couple who swayed a little back, as if they disliked the suggestion.

"Levi Brett gave me money as he died," said the preacher. He produced a wallet. "Here are one hundred dollars. That will go to the one who eats the sin. Also Levi Brett's house on Dravot Ridge."

A hundred dollars in cash must have seemed a fortune to those simple hill folk. A heavy-featured, wide-eyed young man started forward at mention of it. But when the preacher spoke of the house on Dravot Ridge, the young man stepped back among his companions. He shuddered, I think; or perhaps they all shuddered.

I moved toward them. The preacher looked at me. So did something else, that now I saw for the first time.

IT LAY prone by the coffin, brown and motionless. At first I thought it was a hound, then I thought it was not. It was hound-size, and lean like a hound; but its

feet were all wrong, big and furry, and its low, close-drawn way of lying on its belly was more like a weasel. Its eyes did not falter as mine met them. I never saw a dog with ears like those, and the face, what I could see between the wide forepaws, was strange.

"Yes, brother?" the preacher said to me.

"Sir, you ask for a sin-eater," I ventured.

He held the wallet toward me. "A hundred dollars and a house," he repeated. "It is a fine house—so I hear tell."

"The dead man's a stranger?" I suggested.

"Not Levi Brett," mumbled a voice in the group. "Not enough of a stranger, anyhow."

I paused and thought, and tried to decide what sort of thing it was that lay and watched me, there beside the pine coffin. Then I looked back at the preacher. I licked my lips, but my dry tongue would not moisten them.

"I'll do it, if I'm allowed," was what I managed to say. Since I cannot explain how I began to be nervous and frightened so early in the matter, I shall not try. "I'll do it," I said again, more confidently.

"Praise the Lord," a deep-voiced man intoned, and "Amen!" said a shrill woman.

As I walked toward the coffin, the preacher stepped toward me and took my hand in his big, strong bony one. "Let me call a blessing on you now," he said. "Later, you may be glad of a blessing, brother." His eyes searched my face. "You are young, you have a look of light. I pray your soul won't suffer out of reason."

"But you're really concerned for the soul of the dead man," I reminded, and someone said "Amen!" I held out my hand. "Give me the money."

"First repeat," commanded the preacher. "I—and speak your name."

"Obediently I did so."

"Do freely," he prompted me, "and before all living things in this world and the next, assume and take to myself the sins that trouble the soul of the departed Levi Brett."

I said it all, and wound up by swearing, as he urged, on a holy name. Then he handed me the wallet. It was simply cut and sewn, of some wonderfully soft dark leather. I opened it. Inside were ten ten-dollar bills, of the old large size.

"Levi Brett stands clear of evil," said the preacher to his little flock. "He may enter holy ground. The Lord's name be praised."

They burst into song, another old hymn, and six men moved forward to pick up the coffin by wooden cleats that served as handles.

The preacher led, and they carried it past the stake-and-rail fence into the cemetery where, I now saw, was a ready-dug grave. The hymn finished, and all watched.

From the wallet I took a bill. I spoke to the nearest onlooker, a tussock-bearded old man who looked like photographs of Ambrose Powell Hill.

"I'm hungry," I said. "Faint with hunger. I wonder if you would—"

"Take that double-damned money away," he snapped, and his eyes blazed above the hair on his face. "It's the devil's price for what you done. You're a man of sin, young fellow, purely rotting away with the sins of Levi Brett you eaten just now. I had nothing to do with him, and I'll have nothing to do with you."

I felt weaker than ever, and I began to plead. "Then, if you'll take no money, will you be kind enough to—"

A WOMAN came to the man's elbow. She must have been his wife, a tall, strong hill creature. "Young sir," she said, "I never hoped to turn away a hungry creature. But I can't give you food or comfort, less'n your sin may catch onto me. I daren't say more than I pity you. Go on somewhere, where they'll feed you unbeknownst of what you carry. That way, maybe, they'll not lose grace by you."

"Look," stammered a young girl, pointing. "Levi Brett's critter—"

The brown animal had risen from where it lay, on four legs that crooked strangely. It pointed a long nose at me, like a trained hunting dog that shows the prey to its master.

"You've taken Levi Brett's sin indeed," said the bearded man, and the glare in his eyes filmed over with terror. "That thing lived with him on Dravot Ridge, his only family. When he was took sick at the preacher's house, it came and camped under his window. It layed by his coffin—" He broke off and choked, then spat furiously. "Now

it's yourn. Go—please go! Then it'll go with you!"

Everyone drew away from me, toward the fence. Beyond the rails, the coffin-carriers had lowered their burden into the grave, and three of them were spading earth upon it. I felt icy cold, and tried to lie to myself that it was the assault of hunger. I turned away.

Some children began to jabber a little cadenced sneer, to one of those universal childhood tunes:

"Your soul to the devil,

"Your soul to the devil,

"Your soul to the devil—devil—devil—"

After all, I resolutely said in my heart, they didn't mean that. Maybe this was originally an Irish community. I knew that Irishmen sometimes said "Your soul to the devil," for nothing but a joke. I turned and walked, to get away from staring, repelling eyes.

Beyond the clearing where stood the church and the burying-ground I could see trees, denser thickets than those among which I had walked so far. Two trails led into the depths of the timber, and I turned my steps toward one. Something sounded beside me, pit-pat, pit-pat—the brown animal had joined me. It had a long thin tail, and it seemed awkward on all fours, like a monkey. It looked up at me once, more eloquently than dog or cat could manage, and headed for the other trail-head. I went with it.

As the two of us entered the woods, along the dim green bough-roofed arcade that was the trail, I sagely decided where I had seen something like my companion. Charles R. Knight's paintings, as are to be seen in New York's Museum of Natural History, or in books like Scott's *History of Mammals in the Western Hemisphere*, include several things like that, particularly his restorations of the very early mammals of a million years ago and more. Such things, as I consider them, were developed amorously, could be ancestors to the monkeys, the dogs, the cats, the hoofed beasts, or to all of these.

I DO NOT want to dwell too long on the specimen that now padded the trail with me. Its snout was long, almost raccoon-like, but its brow bulged in a way that suggested considerable brain volume to go with those

expressive eyes. Its forelegs had elbows, its rear legs had knees, and the feet that had seemed like big, hairy lumps bore long toes that could, if necessary, clutch like fingers. I wished it would go away, but did not care to shout or gesture at it.

When I heard human feet behind me, I was relieved, but for a single moment only.

THE two who had sat with their backs to the church were following me. As I glanced back, the man waved a skeleton-scrawny arm and the two broke into a run, uncouth but fast, to catch up. Both grinned, showing broken teeth.

"Let them scary folk huddle together and die of the shivers," said the man, breathing hard with his exertions. "We'll see that you get food. Yop, and shelter. That is, we'll see you to your own proper house."

"You did a pure brave thing in taking the sins of Levi Brett," added his companion. "I always say, the young got courage and helpfulness."

I could feel nothing but gratitude in this proffer of help and friendship. In my hand I still carried the bill that I had taken from the wallet, and I held it out.

"Thank you, no," said the man, drawing away. "We're doing it for love," and he flashed his broken teeth in another grin. "You're one of us now."

"You mean, neighbors?" I asked, for I thought they might live on Dravot Ridge.

"Just one of us," said the woman. "Hasn't Parway taken you up?"

She meant the brown animal, which stood close to my side, faced toward them but with eyes ever upon me. So its name was Parway—I suppose that is how to spell it. A long moment its eyes held mine, then it turned and trotted ahead.

"Follow," said the man. "It will lead you home."

The three of us went along. I was glad for what I thought was human companionship. They chatted to me genially enough, asking my name and my home. I gave a false name, and said I had no home.

"You have now," said the old woman, and she and her companion blended their cackles, as at a delicious joke. I like that sort of rudeness as little as anyone, and I spoke sharply:

"You mean Levi Brett's house? The one on Dravot Ridge?"

"Well, yes." The old man made a drawl of it. "Only not exactly. It's yours now, by Levi Brett's spoken will. And it's not a house. It's a gardinel."

That word was strange to me. The world will be happiest if it remains strange to the world. I repeated it, rather stupidly: "Gardinel? What kind of a house is that?"

"A gardinel only looks like a house," the old man informed me, "and it can only be used like a house, by a few people. There's lots of gardinels, young fellow, in towns sometimes, and sometimes in off-way country places like this one."

"You ever walked along a street, and seen something like a house not built quite true, that seems to look at you with eyes instead of windows?" demanded the woman, blinking up at me. "Houses generally with nobody living in them, that everybody stays away from?"

Of course I had seen such houses. Everyone has. "Usually somebody tells me such a place is haunted," I replied.

"And usually it's no more than that," she rejoined. "But once in a while it's not a house, it's a gardinel."

THEY were having fun with me, or were they? . . . The beast named Parway had run ahead, and now it gambolled uncouthly at a bend of the trail some yards ahead. There was light, that meant a clearing of sorts. I walked toward it, and my companions followed at my heels.

The clearing was not large, and lofty trees grew thick around it. In its very center was exactly the sort of house I had been prepared for, with all that mocking mystery of the old man and the old woman.

I was never to decide what it was made of. Living wood, perhaps, hard and massive; of living rock, very living rock. On its solid walls were marks as of carving tools. Its two windows had sills that were of one piece with the house front, and the low-drawn roof, that was like a hat pulled down to the eyelike windows, was of a different color but seemed to be part of the same piece, too. The doorway had not been cut oblong, but irregular, rather like a cave-mouth, and all was dark inside. Parway padded up to

the threshold, looked back once to me, and darted in. At once a dim light went on, as if Parway had kindled it. My uneasiness was braced by angry mystification. Like the proverbial fool rushing in, I followed Parway.

"I have been waiting for you," said a deep, cultured voice, and there sat a human figure on a blocky stool.

The one was a man of indefinite age, with everything forked about him—his little divided beard, his joined and upslanted brows, his spiked moustache, hornlike points of hair at his brow. These things were probably makeup to a certain extent—Satan himself wouldn't have been so lavishly theatrical. The face was gaunt and mocking, with eyes as brilliant as Parway's; but to look intelligent, there would have to be more forehead. He held out a hand, which I had the instinct not to grasp. His gaunt figure was wrapped in a sort of gray gown.

"You'll be wondering," he said to me, "just what is expected of you."

"I do indeed," was my reply. "If you'll be good enough to tell me—"

"Tell me first," he said gently, "how much you know."

I cleared my throat, and wished for a drink of water. "I came to where they were burying someone called Levi Brett. It seemed he couldn't go into a proper grave until someone, by the old custom, assumed his sins. I did so, because I was poor and hungry, and there was a sum of money offered. Levi Brett's sins must have been considerable, because nobody wanted anything to do with me. And I let myself be led here, simply because it seemed easier than to go somewhere else. That's the sum of my knowledge to date, and I'd like to know more."

"Ah," said the man with the forked beard, "you deserve to know more, for the sake of the important things you're to do."

I TOOK time to look at other things than his face. The inside of the house was not properly angled. Walls curved, and junctures at ceiling and floor seemed blunt. There were beams and rafters interestingly tacked on, like ribs enclosing the body cavity of a disembowelled carcass. Beside the stool on which my new acquaintance sat there was only a desk, covered with papers. In a corner Parway had slumped down into that strange

prone position of rest, eyes glued to me. I had a sense of growing disgust, as though I smelled something rotten.

"Permit me," said the man with the forked beard, "my name is Dravot, of the family for which Dravot Ridge is called. And you?"

I gave him the name I had invented for the unsavory couple outside in the clearing. He nodded.

"Let me be simple, though I doubt if the situation can ever be simplified enough to be explained in ordinary words. Levi Brett was—shall we say—brilliantly unusual? Or unusually brilliant? He knew many things, of the sort that weaklings of the ordinary world call forbidden or horrific. This dwelling is the repository of much knowledge. I know relatively little, for I was only his—well, his secretary, his aide. And the two outside are, frankly, stupid underlings. But let us not belittle their courage in accepting Levi Brett's acquaintance and leadership."

"You promised to be simple, and you're not," said I. "Was Levi Brett some sort of sorcerer or wizard? Is that why the people at the church hated his sin?"

"That is exactly the explanation that will do for the moment," smiled Dravot, as if in applause. "You will know better and better, as if dimensions are added to your mind. You have gifts, I daresay, that he lacked. You will carry on what he strove for, the bringing of people hereabout to our way of interesting truth."

I HAD actually forgotten my hunger. About me was a close warmth, a sweaty smell that seemed to go with the carcass cavity form of the apartment. "I take it that Levi Brett did not make many converts to your beliefs," I said.

"It was deliberately that he set up in this community," said Dravot. "Knowledge that supernatural powers exist is part of the Southern hill culture. But with that knowledge goes fear. For many years Levi Brett did his wonders, and he attracted only me and the two out there. We know what power is possible, but the others refuse to know or even to surmise. They hated him. And even I—a native, of a respected family—haven't dared go among them for years."

"Levi Brett turned against all these things you tell about," I said suddenly. "He died

at the preacher's, and left money to buy someone to take over his sins."

There was a sudden storm of cackling laughter from outside, where the old couple were listening. Dravot laughed, too, and pointed his finger.

"Ah, ah, ah," he said, "that took in the fools, but I thought you'd see. Must I explain that, too?"

"You must," I told him, "and seriously. I don't like to be laughed at, Mr. Dravot."

"Forgive me, then. We'll be good friends later. But to explain: Levi Brett knew he must die. He hoped for a son to inherit his knowledge and work, but, for many decisive reasons, he never fathered one. He only pretended to repent—he sought out the preacher deliberately when he felt his last hours upon him. That old ceremony of sin-eating made you his heir, my young friend. You take over his possessions, his knowledge, his work. Good fortune to you."

I gazed at him, uncomprehending. He waved his hand at the papers on the desk.

"Some of these things you may read, but not all. Paper wouldn't contain them. The knowledge, I say, is in this house. Sleep here, dream here. Levi Brett's knowledge will grow within you."

I shook my head. "This has gone far enough," I said. "I dislike practical jokes. For you, as I see it, there is only one way to teach you manners."

Stepping forward, I lifted my fist. I was going to hit him.

HE DID not move, but Parway did. The lithe, strangely made body swooped in front of me. The long jaws opened, and triangular teeth, lead-colored and toxic-seeming, grinned at me. I stopped, dead, staring.

"Parway disagrees," said Dravot. "Meanwhile, if you think this is all a joke, how do you explain Parway?"

"Some sort of freak or hybrid," I said lamely.

Parway glared, and Dravot chuckled.

"He understands. He is not complimented, and I don't blame him. Parway has an interesting origin—you'll have read of such things, perhaps. Old demonologists called them familiars."

I had heard the word. Strange entities,

given as companions and partners in evil to such persons as contracted to serve hell . . . but nobody had imagined anything like Parway.

"Suppose you think these things over," Dravot went on, rather patiently. "I'll leave you. It's evening. I wish you joy, young sir, of your first night in your new quarters."

He got up and strode away. The two outside followed him from the clearing. Light was dying there, but strengthened inside. I saw its source, a great candle in a wall bracket, a candle black as tar that burned with a strong white light like carbide.

My early faintness returned to me, and I sat on the stool. If I could but have some food. . . .

And there it was, on the desk at my elbow.

Parway looked from me to the well-filled tray. Had he brought it from somewhere? I could not see clearly at first, then stared. One steaming dish held a sort of pilaffe. Another cutlets half-hidden in savory sauce. There was a crusty loaf with fruits baked into it, a massy goblet of yellow metal that held dark liquor. In a deep bowl nestled fruits I did not know, but their colors were vivid and they gave off a delicious odor.

I started to reach for the tray, and paused, for my hand trembled so violently. That was when something—somewhere—betrayed its eagerness clumsily.

For the tray edged toward me on the table, as if it crawled on slow, tiny legs.

I sprang up, sick and dizzy with startled fear. The movement of the tray ceased abruptly, but I had seen. I would not have touched the food then, not though final starvation was upon me. I kicked out at the desk and upset it, tray and all.

The tray vanished, and the dishes, before they struck the flat, dull, solid floor. Parway looked at me bitterly, then reproachfully, and slunk to a corner. I sank back on my stool, wondering furiously.

That feast that had come at my mind's silent bidding, had vanished when I rejected it—there was precedent for such things in the history, or pretended history, of magic. Did not the witches gorge themselves luxuriously at their meetings, which the scholars call sabbats? Was not such gorging a kind of infernal sacrament, which bound the eater

to his nasty worship? I congratulated myself on my refusal.

For now I was believing the things that had been told me.

THE NIGHT that closed in would be chill, I knew, but inside the room the air grew warmer, if anything, and closer. Parway, still crouched in the corner, gazed at me expectantly. I hated that steady stare, direct but not honest. Turning my head, I saw the papers spilled from the overturned desk. Stooping, I lifted one.

The first word my glance caught was "gardinel," and at once I began to read with deepest interest:

"They may be small or large, conventional-seeming or individual, according to the words said and the help asked. Choose the place where one will grow, mark the ground plan, scatter the meal of the proper plant, and say—"

There was considerably more, but I would do humanity a disservice to write it here, even if I remembered correctly. Suffice it to say that it spoke of houses, or things like houses, being rapidly grown from nothingness like a sort of fungus. I remembered what I had heard earlier on the trail to Levi Brett's lair, the words of the old man: "*A gardinel only looks like a house, and it can only be used like a house, by a few people.* Was I to be one of such people? Had my declaration that I assumed Levi Brett's sins made me a creature of sorcery, whether I wanted it or not?

"I won't have this," I said, "I'm going."

Rising, I started for the door, but again Parway moved before me. His teeth bared, he crouched low on his rear haunches and lifted his forelimbs. His paws spread their toes, like clumsy hands to strike or grasp, and I could not find the resolution to attack him.

"What do you want?" I demanded, as if he would understand. And he did understand, and pointed with a paw, to the scattered papers. One blew toward me, or I thought it blew. Perhaps it crept of itself. I did not touch it, but bent to read the writing:

"Prepare the mind to receive knowledge. Empty yourself of your own thoughts. Then—"

My eyes read those words, and in the same moment my ears heard them—whether from without or within, how shall I say now? It's all very well to accuse me of hysterical imagination; but if it's easy to be cool and analytical in such a crisis, try it yourself some time. What I do remember well is the script on the page, crabbed but clear and black, and the quality of the speaking, deep and harsh and metallic, like the voice you would expect from Frankenstein's monster.

I straightened up and turned away, muttering a curse. Probably I should have spoken a prayer instead. Empty myself of my thoughts—and what would take their place? The thoughts of another, the things Levi Brett had known, thoughts which still crowded, bodyless, in this awful room and waited for a mind into which to slide themselves. Then I'd be Levi Brett.

I DID not want to be Levi Brett. I did not want the knowledge with which his thoughts were freighted. Anyone, even a skeptic, could see how fatal that would be. "You take over his possessions, his knowledge, his work," Dravot had told me that. I would live in this house that wasn't a house, eat foods of which I knew not the name that came from I knew not where. My companions would be Dravot, Parway, one or two of the God-forgotten among the natives. I wanted no such legacy. How to reject it, and remain what I had been, a starved and wretched wanderer?

The food, I remembered, had vanished. That was because I had refused it. Perhaps I had a clue to the procedure. I turned toward Parway.

"Go away," I commanded. "Go away, and let this house—what they call a gardinel—go, too. And everything else. I reject it."

Parway showed his teeth. This time he smiled, worse than any human being could manage. He laughed, too—no, someone outside laughed. Dravot was lounging just outside the door.

"Show grace," he bade me, tauntingly. "You can't turn back from us now. Accept. How else can we have you for our chief?"

"I'm no chief of yours," I said. "I refuse to be."

"Too late." He pronounced the words

with a satisfaction that was downright smug. "You can't give back what you've taken. From now on you'll live here, think here, work here. Open your mind, and cease to be a fool."

From the darkness beyond him came a patter of voices. The disgusting old couple had come back with Dravot, and they prayed. I'd rather not repeat the prayer, or the names it invoked. I put my hands over my ears.

"I'll not listen!" I shouted. "Let me out of here!"

Jumping to the threshold, I struck at Dravot. He bobbed easily out of danger, and I started into the open after him. At the same time something clawed and clutched at me from behind—the paw of Parway. It scrabbled and wriggled like a knot of gnawing worms, indescribably filthy. Then, I thank heaven, my ragged old jacket tore in the grasp he fastened upon it, and a moment later I was out in the clearing.

I wanted to run, but I knew I must not. I could not endure another seizure from behind. Anyway, the horrid old man and woman stood at the head of the one lane through the thick-grown trees. Abruptly I threw off the remains of the torn jacket and kicked them aside. With both hands I caught a stub of dead branch and wrenched it free from its parent stem. I poised it like a club. There was a strange flowing into me of resolution and rightness.

"Come on now," I challenged Dravot. "I'll flail the grin off of your face. Bring those two swine with you, and Parway if he dares. I'll fight you all four."

But they did not come. They stood where they were—Dravot nearest, the two oldsters by the trail-head, Parway squatting uncouthly in the lighted doorway. Their four pairs of eyes gazed at me, glowing greenly, like the eyes of frightened flesh-eating animals.

"You're not being fair," Dravot stammered, and I found the strength to laugh at that.

"Fair!" I echoed. "Fair, after you tried to trick me into this deviltry?" I lifted the stick. I felt strong.

"He did it," mouthed the old man beyond Dravot. "Chance, or some butt-in power from somewhere—he grabbed a hazelnut branch!"

"But we called lightning to blast it dead!" quavered the voice of the old woman.

"It stood because, dead or not, we couldn't touch it," Dravot flung at them. "Shut your mouths, or he'll guess."

I HAD guessed. Hazelnut, I had armed myself with hazelnut, a tree of force against ill magic. What says Albertus Magnus? I've looked it up since, and found it in his writings, not once but in many places. *Cut a hazelnut stick, and therewith strike the witch or wicked being* . . . something like that.

"You're all dirt," I raged at them, "and I'll plant hazelnut over any of you that dares face me."

Dravot had sidled forward, but kept out of reach of my stick. His foot gingerly touched my torn jacket, kicked it toward me. "It's yours," he said. "Take it back."

"Let it lie," I replied, wondering why he insisted on such a thing at such a moment.

"Take it back," he repeated, and lifted the rags on his toe. For an instant light from the doorway picked out something, the dark wallet of Levi Brett that protruded halfway from a pocket.

"I won't," I snapped. "That money is one of the things I want to give back."

"He knows!" squealed the old woman, and the old man slapped his skinny hand over her mouth. Dravot cursed her in words that made my scalp tingle. With a kick of his foot, he threw the jacket at me. It soared like a tatter-winged bat.

I struck at it with my club. It caught on the end and flapped there for a moment, then went sailing back, full into Dravot's face.

He screamed, as shrilly as the old woman could have managed, and pawed at the fabric with his hands. It had wrapped itself around his face like a net. I heard his muffled pleading that someone set him free, but nobody moved. The old man and woman had run away up the trail, and Parway drew back inside the house-thing. I stepped close to Dravot and began to beat him.

"Why didn't you take the money, if taking it meant such great power?" I yelled as my stick thumped on his swaddled head.

"You were afraid—or what? Things too evil for you?"

He tried blindly to defend himself. His outflung hand once grasped my stick; but he let go at once, with a howl as though electric current had run through him.

"Parway! Parway!" he cried, and Parway emitted the one sound I heard from him in all the incident. It was like a sound, human in quality but wordless. Dravot, still pawing at the clinging coat around his face and head, turned and stumbled in the direction from which Parway's voice had come.

"I rejected that money," I called after him, "and it has fastened on you. Now you can't let it go. Suffer from your own sins and those of Levi Brett!"

As Dravot reached the threshold, Parway ran from him, back inside. I saw him as he lurched against the wall, and he jarred the great black candle from its bracket. Dravot stumbled blindly, sprawled through the door, and lay still there. He must have fainted.

THE candle no more than struck the floor when flames burst and bloomed like flowers from a stage magician's trick rose-tree. Something in the construction or material fed those flames like suet. They sprang and spread everywhere. Parway, cut off by them from the one exit, scrambled back into a corner that would not long remain unkindled. Dravot lay, still motionless, even when tongues of fire lapped eagerly across

him. The fire was dark, giving off oily wisps of smoke. I retreated, toward the lane up which the old couple had run away.

I departed, feeling my path in the dark with the hazelnut stick. I tried to rationalize, even though the matter was not rational.

Everything had centered around Levi Brett's bribe-money, which had doomed me when I accepted, which freed me when I thrust it away. The evil had been desperate when Dravot, as unprepared as I, came in contact. It had fastened upon him like a snake.

What now happened to him, in the heart of the burning, meant that I was spared the curse. I groped along as swiftly as I could. After moments, I heard a noise, a long quavering whoop or wail—not Parway, certainly not Dravot. The house, the thing called a gardinel—if it lived, could it feel? If it felt, could it scream its pain of fire?

I made myself run. I kept running until I was beyond earshot. Then I slowed to a walk again.

My weakness and hunger returned, and I had to brace my spirit to endure them. I must keep going until morning. By then I might have come to some other district among the hills, where nobody would guess that for an hour I had been in the grip of cursed magic. People would see me for a starved stranger, and offer me something to eat.

WEIRD TALES for MARCH

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Transference of Sin

MANLY WADE WELLMAN, who combines a broad and intensive knowledge of matters weird with the born story-teller's ability to make those matters highly entertaining, has some thoughts for us apropos of his good yarn, "Sin's Doorway," in this issue of WEIRD TALES.

Confides Wellman:

Whatever the merits or successes of the custom of sin-eating at a funeral, it was once widely practised and still hangs on here and there. I gather that it is Anglo-Saxon usage; but the belief in transference of sin is universal—*vide* the Scapegoat ceremony described in Holy Writ. Similar rites are noticed in *The Golden Bough* as occurring in every part of the world.

As to gardenels, I have but one informant about such things. He's convinced that they exist, and plenty of them, and he has slowed me up considerably in any impulse I may feel to enter strange empty houses.

Things like these are apter to bob up in the American South than anywhere else. It's a witch-ridden and devil-haunted place, and many a tale not told by Uncle Remus is offered you there for the truth. And it's easy to disbelieve such things when you're a newcomer and know no better. When you've been there a little while, you may have certain facts proven to you, and it's seldom a pleasant proof. I, for one, wouldn't take the responsibility for more sin than my own soul carries, not for all the dollars in Dixie.

Manly Wade Wellman

READERS' VOTE

KURBAN
CHARIOTS OF SAN
FERNANDO
SIN'S DOORWAY
SEED
MR. BAUER AND THE
ATOMS

SATAN'S PHONOGRAPH
PIKEMAN
THE DIVERSIONS OF
MME. GAMORRA
ALL THE TIME IN THE
WORLD

Here's a list of nine stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales—then clip it out and send it to us.

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Weird Tales

MARCH

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A novelette of ominous omens and double-evil

"TWICE CURSED" by Manly Wade Wellman

Twice Cursed

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

"... see by this image, which is
thine own, how utterly thou has
murdered thyself."

—EDGAR ALLAN POE,
William Wilson.

I

BUt everything was a wonder now that I was in New York again, and pleasantly wonderful, too—not horribly wonderful, like the sniper-haunted jungles and bullet-ripped beaches I had striven for in the war I hoped would be the last forever. I still wore my uniform, since I had no other clothes, with on the right breast a discharge device in bright yellow thread and on the left my color-mixture of campaign ribbons. A sandy-haired civilian bought me a drink in a bar near Union Square and assured me that battle-fears weren't as terrible as fears of the unknown. He argued that you knew what to expect in war. What could you tell someone who had never heard a shot fired in anger, a shot fired in anger straight at him? Of that nothing is more unknown than the outcome of the battle you are in, with Joe and Mac and the other friends you love dropping limp and dead beside you or trying to stuff back their insides that have been blown out, and the thought coming to you a dozen times a minute that perhaps your side is losing? I plastered on a smile, thanked him for the drink, and went out to walk down Fourth Avenue among the bookshops. And there it was, not far from Tenth Street, rather different because it hadn't a table in front with shabby old volumes for a dime or a quarter, but with its windows jammed with interesting things and its sign:

THE SPOORN, BOOKSELLERS

I have never decided if the bizarre arrangement in those windows was an arrangement at all, but it was impressive. The biggest book was bigger than a volume of the *Congressional Record*, bound in some pale leather, with strange printing that might be Arabic or Urdu, and a colored picture of something ten-armed and scowling and staring. Near this, a *Summers, Geography of Witchcraft*, flanked by paper-bound *Albertus Magnus* and *The Long Lost Friend*. There were some recent publications—*Tell My Horse* by Hurston, *Hex Marks the Spot*, by Ann Hark, and poor William Seabrook's *No Hiding Place*. One shabby book looked like a pasted-up collection of scraps and manuscript notes, entitled in ink *The Jersey Devil*. This was like old times, when I found all my thrills and chills in strange writings about ghosts and devils.

I walked in. The shop itself couldn't have been more perfect if it had been built as a set for one of those B-picture scaries at the Rialto. All the lights were close to the door, quite glaring, and the shelves that stood endwise to us at the back had no lights at all, so that the spaces between them were like gloomy caves. Under the lights were some counters and tables, with cards saying things like: RARE AND CURIOUS—ASK CLERK—COLLECTOR'S ITEM. On the wall hung a painting, one of those clutters that can be put with any edge up and be something different and startling.

From one table I took up a book. On its fly-leaf was written in pencil: *Of Brownjis and of Bogilis full is thys Buke*. I'd read that somewhere—Gawain Douglass or Robert Burns? Or had Burns quoted Douglass at

*There are some things more deadly than war experiences—
like working in a particular bookstore!*

the head of some poem? *Tam O'Shanter*, maybe?

"Yes, Sergeant?" someone was half whispering at my elbow, evidently with eyes on those three stripes I wore. I put down the book and turned.

THE Spoom's proprietor was smaller and slighter than I, though I am hardly a big man. His clothes did not look expensive, but they fitted him beautifully, there is no other word for it. Some figures are like that, any cheap suit in their size arrays them as though



Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

brilliantly tailored. He was long-jawed and sharp-nosed, smiling harshly, with bracket-lines all around his mouth and his tin-colored eyes. His hands, with their great long fingers and great long nails, rubbed together rather like Uriah Heep's. "What would you like to see?" he was prompting.

To tell the truth, I could hardly buy anything worth money. I had received only part of my separation pay and had spent most of it. "I'm not exactly a customer," I ventured, smiling back.

"I see," said the proprietor, and rubbed his hands faster. "A job, then. What's your name, Sergeant?"

The thought of working in a bookshop was brand new to me, and intriguing. I wondered why I hadn't considered it before. "I'm Jackson Warren," I told him, "and I'm not a sergeant any more."

"Yes, I know. We hadn't really planned on your being here until tomorrow morning, but—"

This was where training and experience in strange and surprising situations helped. The fellow was actually hiring me, pretending some kind of second sight or other sympathy that had prepared him to do so. I hadn't expected to be employed so soon, or in any field I liked so well. Even as I decided not to act mystified or stupid, he was naming a salary not too small, and discussing hours of work. "One day you can open the shop in the morning and stay until six," he said, "and the next come at noon and remain open until nine at night. Since you're here today, sit down in the office back there read what I've written about the job. You're intelligent and liberal-minded. I know. Tomorrow morning you'll be ready to start."

I went past those dark bookshelves at the rear of the room, and into a little cell not much larger than a telephone booth, with its walls solidly lined with old, curious and strangely-titled books. There was room for a chair, a little table with a typewriter and a telephone. I sat down with the pencilled sheets of paper he indicated, and began to read and puzzle.

Plainly those instructions had been written lately and hurriedly. My name was at the top, and the first sentence was enough to make my eyes pop. "I expect great things from you, on the word of your sponsor. . . ."

"My name," said the proprietor, "is, of course, the Spoon."

"The Spoon?" I repeated. "It's a Scotch name?"

"Yes," and he was gone. I reflected that the heads of Scottish clans used the definite article to name themselves—the MacDonald, the MacLeod, and so on. I had never heard of Clan Spoon, or of the head of a clan who ran a bookshop in a foreign country. As I returned to my written pages, the telephone purred on the table, and I picked it up. "The Spoon Bookshop," I said briskly.

"This is Jackson Warren." That was not a question, but a confident statement.

"Jackson Warren speaking," I told the transmitter.

"Hmmm," said the man at the other end, in a way I sometimes use myself. "You don't understand. I'm Jackson Warren. I wanted to call about the job—"

"But I have the job," I assured him. "I've just been hired. What can I do—"

"Hmmm," he said again, and hung up. I shook my head over it, all by myself in that tiny office, and resumed my reading.

"As an ex-soldier and an ex-sergeant, you know without being instructed what is meant by loyalty and discretion," the Spoon had written for me. "Any good employee will keep his council while learning—"

The telephone rang again, and again I picked it up. "The Spoon Bookshop," I announced into it.

"Did I hear you right?" said the same voice as before. "You called yourself Jackson Warren."

"Ex-Sergeant Jackson Warren," I replied. "Just out of the service and into the retail book trade. What can I do for you?"

"You can explain," was the sharp rejoinder. "It so happens that I'm Ex-Sergeant Jackson Warren."

"Is this a gag?" I laughed, not very heartily. "There can't be two of us."

"I wonder." There was a moment of moody silence. "Will you do me a favor?"

"Such as?" I prompted.

"When you leave there, will you meet me?" He sounded eager and a little shaky. "Somewhere near there?"

I frowned over it, then told him the name of the bar where the civilian had instructed

me about known and unknown fears. "I'll be there as soon after six as possible," I informed him. "Right?"

"Right, and thanks."

I hung up. The Spoom had come to the door.

"Why," I asked him, "should anybody know I was working here?"

"Why shouldn't he know, if he's a friend of yours?" asked the Spoom. "Wasn't it arranged some time ago?"

To these questions I had no answer to give. I took up the sheets. "May I take these with me? I'll absorb them between now and opening time tomorrow."

He nodded his head to grant the request, and I folded them and slid them into my shirt pocket. I left almost at six, and went to the bar.

But as I sat on a stool and ordered a beer, it came to my mind that neither I nor the strange man on the telephone had offered any basis for recognition. There were half a dozen men at that bar, and unless I asked each in turn if he had taken part in a strange conversation that day—

But someone came in at the door, and toward me. I stared straight into the questioning eyes of myself.

II

THE man was young, twenty-six years old or so. He was perhaps five feet nine inches tall, sparely made, a little wide in the shoulders.

His hair was dark and short, with a square face and wide-set brown eyes and a creasy dimple in his chin. He wore an army uniform, a little worn but neat, with the three stripes of a sergeant and the device that betokened honorable discharge. All these things I recognized instantly. I had seen them so often before, in mirrors.

He and I smiled at the same moment and with the same perplexity. He spoke first: "You look enough like me to be my twin brother."

"I haven't any twin brother," I said. That was out of Wedhouse.

"Neither do I. This is a funny thing. I came here to meet somebody with the same name as I have."

"I'm Jackson Warren," I told him.

He put out a hand just the size and shape of mine. "So am I. Let's start talking."

I picked up my beer and we went to a booth. A waiter brought him a beer like mine, and he began talking rapidly.

"Let's get it straight at once," he said. "That's my job. Rowley Thorne—my friend—knew I was looking for work, and called up the Spoom shop and fixed it for me to start there tomorrow. What are you doing with my job and my name and my face?"

It never took me too long to get angry. "The job you can have, because apparently the Spoom thinks I'm you," I told him. "But I grew up with the name and face and they're as much mine as yours. I won't change the name, and I don't think you'll get far changing the face."

For a moment he glared back. His expression must have been a mirror-replica of mine. Then he relaxed a little, and the hardness became mystification. "We're going at this wrong," he said. "I don't blame you for being sore if you're as rattled as I am. Maybe it's not too much that we look alike—we're only a little more than average size, and we both have the usual Anglo-Celtic face. As to the name, Warren's not uncommon, but Jackson is—for a Christian name, anyway."

"I was born in Lynchburg, and my people named me for Stonewall Jackson," I explained, also a little less heatedly.

"And I'm Carolinian, though I haven't kept much of the accent," said my companion. "I was named for the other Jackson, Andrew. Let's go back to the last remark but one, as somebody says in *Alice*. I thought you'd been pretty elaborate about gnawing under me into that job. But you said you didn't want it."

"Oh, I want it. I'm not very rich or anything. But," and I drew the Spoom's instruction sheets from my pocket, "I haven't really started, and I won't start where I don't really belong. You can have these, study them—they tell what your duties will be—and go in there tomorrow. The Spoom won't know the difference."

The other Jackson Warren took the sheets, but did not glance at them for a moment. "You know, I've heard of a case like this before. At Leavenworth Prison it was, I think—two men sentenced there, the same size and with faces alike enough to fool their

mothers. Both named West, and I can't remember the first name, but they both had it. Fingerprints were the only difference. I wonder if ours are alike, or anywhere near alike."

"I was born in Lynchburg," I said again, "May 8, 1921—"

"Me, too!" he cried, so sharply that one of the two customers glanced our way. And now neither of us spoke for a moment, until I tried to say something.

"There's too much coincidence here. Too much."

"There's no coincidence," he said harshly. "This was planned some way or other. But how? Why? I wonder if the two of us aren't in a jam."

"Read those instructions," I suggested. "Since you're the right man for the job, they may make sense to you."

HE BEGAN to read, and I sipped at my beer. After some minutes he folded the papers carefully, picked up his own glass and drank deeply.

"They make sense, all right," he said. "Who do Rowley Thorne and the Spoom think they're fooling?"

I couldn't answer that, so I waited for him to go on. He was studying my campaign ribbons. "Pacific Theater," he said. "Well, we're different there. I was in Europe, and for a while in Iceland. I had time on my hands, and dug into witchcraft and demonology—"

"For which Iceland is famous," I added.

"I'm not very surprised that you know that," he said. "Somebody up there gave me the name of Rowley Thorne in the States, and when I came back here he and I got together. He suggested that I take this job, and I was grateful for it. Wait a second, are you part of whatever his scheme is?"

"I'm part of no scheme that I know of, and everything I told you is true." I dug out papers and orders I had been given at the separation center, and he took them and read my name on them. He passed them back as though they weighed a ton. Then he tapped his fingers on the Spoom's written pages.

"Here's the payoff. The Spoom is running a funny bookshop, a very funny bookshop indeed. What Rowley Thorne sent me there for, and what the Spoom hired me—

or you—for, was the stuff I studied in Iceland. But I don't want anything to do with it."

"It's a shop full of peculiar books," I said, and told him a little about it. He heard me silently, nodding a little as if I was telling him a lot.

"I have a notion," he said when I finished. "Let's both go up there and wreck the place. Wish we had some grenades."

"Is it that bad?"

"Worse. What little I know—and I don't want to know any more—wait. We'll have to talk this over. Where are you staying?"

I had no place, and said so. My baggage was checked at the Pennsylvania Station.

"Come to my place, then. I've got a big room, with a bed and a couch, on West Nineteenth. I meant what I said a moment ago, this is no coincidence. We've both been put into this as duplicate cogs in some sort of machine. Let's talk and think and get the machine running the right way."

"That's a deal," I said, and our identical right hands grabbed at each other again. "Come up with me to get my bag. But what'll we call each other? We can't both be Jackson."

"We're different Jacksons," he reminded. "I'll call you Stonewall."

"You be Andy," I said, and he grinned. I liked that grin, perhaps because I'd seen it so often in my shaving mirror. We finished our beer and started out together.

A man turned from the bar to stare at us. His eyes grew as big as dollar watches, and he set the highball he was holding back on the bar.

"Not another drop," he stammered to the bartender. "Never again. Not when I see 'em in twos—"

Andy and I went out laughing at the tops of our voices. I mention that because we had so little to laugh at in the days that followed.

III

ANDY'S lodging was on West Nineteenth Street, and we went there after eating dinner in the Village. His street was full of immense, loud trucks, but the rooms—he had two, part of a widow's apartment—were at the back. We took

more beer up with us, and sat talking, more about ourselves than about The Spoom's shop.

It kept adding up to a case of complete duplication. We found we were both orphans, reared by aunts. We'd both been half-mile runners in high school, we'd both gone to college—he at Chapel Hill, I at University of Virginia—and left in junior year to enlist. Even our studies and grade-levels were alike. We both liked to read about the supernatural; he'd logically poked into Icelandic demon-lore, just as I'd tried to learn something about devil-devil and praying to death when I was stationed in the Solomons.

"I wonder if we aren't both avoiding one consideration," said Andy, pouring beer into my mug.

"You mean the doppelganger business," I nodded. "The way I used to hear it, everyone has his replica, either a spirit or a living creature. You come face to face with it, and you fall dead. But I never felt better in my life, Andy."

"Me, too," he informed me. "If we wrote all this down it wouldn't be convincing."

"It sounded convincing enough when Edgar Allan Poe wrote it," I argued. "Remember *William Wilson*?"

"I've been remembering all evening. Likewise *Charles Dudley Warner—My Double and How He Undid Me*. Probably we ought to decide which of us is the victim and which the nemesis. Toss a coin—"

"Roger," and I pulled a dime from my pocket, flipped it in the air and let it fall. It rolled, struck a wide crack between two floor boards, and remained on edge.

"There's our answer," said Andy, handing the dime back to me. "We're both in this thing together. Let's keep on drinking, or we'll not get much sleep."

We didn't, anyway. The reveille habit was strong in both of us, and we woke before dawn. Andy pulled open a closet.

"I'm a little up on you," he smiled. "I've got some civvies, two or three suits. Pick one out. Shirts in the drawer. You'll buy some for yourself today or tomorrow."

His clothes fitted me nicely. I helped him with breakfast, eggs and rolls and coffee,

whipped up over an electric grill on his bureau. "Now what?" he asked.

"Go to the Spoom's, and meet me for lunch at noon. We'll powwow some more. Don't let on about this double business. Maybe it's an ace in the hole for us."

"Right." We decided on a cafeteria not far from the shop, and he went away.

Even then my chief reaction was of fascinated wonder that I had stumbled upon so complete a twin to myself. I spent the morning in clothing stores of the Twenties, getting a gray suit and some shirts and ties of different style from Andy's. This was deliberate. I even considered growing a mustache, or wearing spectacles, but the clothes were enough of a difference.

I WAS at the cafeteria a quarter of an hour before noon, and so was Andy. He had begged off early, saying he must buy some cough medicine. I put plenty of lunch on my tray, but Andy's appetite, at least, was different from mine. He led the way to a semi-remote table, gulped at his coffee, and began lecturing me.

"It's a little more disgusting than I thought possible," he began. "That sounds funny, from an old frontline infantryman who knows what the score is on disgust; but I mean it. They don't want me to sell books—they don't sell books themselves, except as a front—"

"They?" I interrupted. "Who are they? Are there two Spooms, too?"

"Lots of 'em," said Andy. "He's one of a bunch of wrong guys, Stonewall. All wrong guys. You and I read about witches and devil-worshippers for fun and think it's fiction. They are witches and devil-worshippers, and think—and know—it's real."

"Then they're mad," I began, but he waved me quiet.

"With rotten method in their madness. Think off all the dirt you've ever heard or suspected about black magic. Nasty ceremonies, baby sacrifices, death spells, cowardly sneaky organizations to fight anything that's normal and pleasant and friendly. Think of it as actual, or at least studied and done by all sorts of little cabals and societies everywhere—thick in New York, because this is a big town and full of funny doings. And think of a sort of library-meet-

ing place for those people, or anyway their leaders, their miserable wry-faced, wry-minded leaders. Did you notice the bookshelves without any lights at the back of the room?"

"I wondered how anybody could even read the titles there," I remembered, watching Andy closely and nervously.

"Don't look at me as if you wanted to call for a straitjacket. Some people can read the titles, because they have special eyes. Or perhaps they know the books by touch or instinct—anyway, the Spoom has nothing there that he offers for sale. Odd customers look only at the stuff on the tables and counters. The Spoom's real business is with people who come in and borrow those dark-shelf volumes."

"Get to some sort of starting point," I begged him, and he drew a long breath.

"You saw those instructions, and didn't understand them. I read them a bit more clearly, because they referred to a wish to use my studies in Iceland, and because they were building up to some kind of oath of secrecy." Again Andy drew a long breath, as if to clean some sort of bad air out of his lungs. "When I arrived, this morning, the Spoom was waiting for me. He had me into that little cubby of an office, and gave me a book to translate. It was all in handwritten letters of a funny jagged sort—runes, I think, and Icelandic. When I said I couldn't read Icelandic, only talk a little, he wasn't at all disappointed. He said I'd pick it up soon, and left me alone. He was right. After I was alone a while, that writing began to make sense."

"What was it about?"

"Magic. Power. All the wrong sort. There were spells to bring up devils—I stopped reading one in the middle, because I had a sense of something getting ready to crawl out from under the table. There was quite an essay, sneering because the investigators of the Moira-Blockula witchcraft seem to have missed the boat on its real leaders. And a lot of instruction for novices coming into the outfit. That's when I paused and shut it up and told the Spoom I wasn't having any."

"What was he doing while you were letting those runes seep into you?" I asked.

"He waited on a customer or two, and greeted several of his ugly friends. Twice men came in with what I think was food—lots of food—and he unlocked a door and let them go downstairs to deliver it—somewhere." Andy licked his lips. I do that, too, when my lips are dry from excitement. "But when I said I'd had enough of his runic book, he turned on one of those hard smiles of his. He said it was too late. By reading the book at all, I was practically past my first initiation into a very unorthodox but very interesting fellowship. Those were his words. He tried to get me to go downstairs through that door he keeps locked. Finally I pretended to agree, but asked for a chance to go to lunch first. He made me swear, by some names I never heard, that I'd tell nobody about it except myself."

Andy told me the names, and it will shortly be apparent in this account why I do not mention them here.

"You're breaking your oath," I reminded him. "You're telling me—but, when it comes to that, I'm really yourself, or your other face and mind. Look here, you're upset. Let me go back there instead of you."

"Neither of us will go back," he said firmly.

"We can't let it sweat us out, Andy," I argued. "We're onto something that needs to be investigated. We're the guys to do it. Go back to the room and I'll sit in for you this afternoon."

But he shook his head. "We're dressed differently now. He'd wonder about that. I'll go myself—you're right about finding out more things. Meet me at the corner after quitting time."

And I let him arrange it that way. I went back to West Nineteenth Street, washed my face—it was hot and feverish—and subways up to the public library to track down something I seemed to remember.

I found it in Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Book Eight, Chapter Fifteen. I copied it down in modern spelling: "... and they have so frayd us with bull-beggars, spirits, witches, urchins, elves, hags, fairies, satyrs, Pans, fauns, sylvans, Kitt-with-the-candlestock, tritons, centaurs, dwarfs, giants, imps, calcars, conjurers,

nymphs, changelings, incubus, Robin Good-fellow, the spook, the man-in-the-oak, the hellwain, the fire-drake, the puckle, Tom Thumb, Hobgoblin, Tom Tumbler, Boneless and such other bugbears, that we are afraid of our own shadows, inasmuch that some never fear the devil but on a dark night; and then a polled sheep is a perilous beast, and many times is taken for our father's soul, specially in a churchyard, where a right hardy man heretofore durst not to have passed by night but his hair would stand upright."

That catalogue of frightening monsters held its riddles. The man-in-the-oak must be a forest devil, the hellwain perhaps Hellequin—harlequin?—but what were Kitt-with-the-candlestick, Boneless, and the spook?

I had used to wonder about that last. Now it was a name I knew.

Going back to the room, I smoked too much and made myself some coffee. The landlady came and knocked and said there was a visitor. "John Thunstone, he says his name is," she told me.

I knew no John Thunstone, but Andy might. "Tell him to come in," I said, and he entered, stooping to get through the door. He was inches over six feet, and unusually broad even for that height. All his clothes must have been made specially for him, suit, shoes, shirts. He had a face like a rectangle, with a broad brow and jaw, a small dark mustache and black hair combed close to his great cranium.

"Are you Jackson Warren?" he asked, and when I nodded his big face lighted up with relief.

"Thank heaven for whatever made you fail to go back to work at that bookshop this afternoon," said John Thunstone. "Because if you had, I might never have brought you out again."

IV

I SAT down hard, without the thought or manners left to invite him to take a chair. He stepped closer and towered over me like some statue of heroic size.

"You know a little something, I think, about demonology," he began. "Enough to appreciate what I mean when I tell you

that the Spook and his shop are a front for a rankly wicked group of—"

"I knew a little about it," I broke in, not too politely. "But how do you know? What makes it your business?"

He smiled down, as from calm summits. "So many people think I meddle where I have no right or motive," he said. "Let me say at once that such people are the sort whose good will I reject, and whose destruction I practise. I found out about you the same place that Rowley Thorne found out, from someone in Iceland. That someone said you were being referred to Thorne in New York, and that Thorne would try to use you in a way you'll find decidedly unsatisfactory—"

"Mr. Thunstone," I interrupted again, "You've got the wrong Jackson Warren. You're talking about my double, Andy."

I was probably foolish to trust him on his own showing, but I told him everything, as quickly and simply as I could. He listened calmly and politely, and without the slightest indication that he found the story unusual.

"I like what your friend—Andy, as you call him—said about this being no coincidence. Only deliberate and cosmic plan could make you duplicates in all things, and bring you together at this time and in this situation. I have an explanation—but no time to make you understand it. Later, perhaps. We have to get your friend Andy out of a dangerous mess."

"What kind of mess?" I demanded.

He picked up his gray felt hat, a hat big enough for even Daniel Webster's spacious cranium. "Come along, and I'll talk as we get a taxi."

He did, while we rode to Tenth Street. He said that Rowley Thorne was one of many who patronized the Spook's back shelves full of evil books, and that the shop was a sort of rendezvous for diabolists and psychic scoundrels, just as a certain corner drugstore draws the adolescents of a neighborhood, or a certain bar is a hangout for prize fighters and their managers, or a certain restaurant gets the artistic trade to the exclusion of most others. It was not only an unofficial reference library for them, but a place to receive mail—lots of them, said Thunstone, did not dare stay at

one address for any length of time for a variety of reasons. And there was something going on in the basement that he, Thunstone, was trying to learn about.

"Andy told me something at lunch," said I. "About food being sent down through a locked door."

"Food?" echoed Thunstone. "In other words, not only is there activity in that basement—there's a set of living quarters. Here's where we get out."

It was not at the Spoon shop, nor even on the same street, but around the corner. Thunstone led me to a door flush with the sidewalk, a little stationery stand. The proprietor greeted him with a smile of warm welcome that used the mouth, the eyes, the whole face. Thunstone led me to a telephone booth with a sign that said "out of order," and pulled open the door. He squeezed his big body in—and through. His hand came back to twitch me by the sleeve, and I followed him. As I entered, I saw that the back of the booth was hinged, and when it swung before us we went into a chamber beyond.

"My busybody activities have gathered me friends and helpers like the fellow out there," Thunstone told me. "People give me information and shelter and weapons and—no time to tell all about that. I've spent months arranging to slip quietly along here," and he led me through another door to a room still rearward, "to a point directly behind the bookshop."

This last room we entered was completely bare of furniture, rug or pictures. Its walls were drab, covered with that stuff they call—very accurately—distemper. The one window was covered with a blind, and a single naked light bulb hung from a cord overhead. Thunstone moved silently as a foraging cat for all his size, coming to the wall and placing his ear against it. At his gesture, I did the same.

AT ONCE I heard something, muffled at first, then separating itself into sounds, words. They were words in a language I did not know—or did I not? The sense, at least, of what was being said behind the wall was clarifying in my ear and my brain. It was like a prayer: *Saya Salna Elenke Serna, give us the wisdom which*

only we can endure, having strength by humility. . . .

Thunstone had caught my shoulder, pulling me away from the wall and through the door into the first hidden room. There were chairs, and he pushed me into one, then sat down himself. "How many were reciting?" he asked.

"Several. More than one, anyhow."

"It's the school," he muttered, to himself more than to me. "And the poor kid's being matriculated—" He paused, looking at me. "Tell me something again. I think you said that Andy spoke of giving a promise of some sort to the Spoon."

"That's right," I remembered. "He pretended to agree to a suggestion—"

"Pretended—and put himself in danger!" exploded Thunstone. "The very nursery tales are full of things like that. A chance word or action, not meant at all, becomes binding when the dark powers are interested. Willing or not, deliberate or not, your friend Andy has made an act of allegiance. The book he began to read was another point. A glance at it showed him it was downright evil. He should have walked out then and there, and all they could have done was try to kill him."

"But you spoke of a school," I said unsteadily. "You think Andy's being put into that."

"I do, and I believe it will change him completely. Up to now he's been normal, decent, sane. But three years underground—"

I whistled sharply. "Three years! In that basement?"

"Others have done that course of study. I knew one, who died wretchedly and whose only hope was that he could repent enough before death. I'm sure of the school now, the Icelandic tie was the final bit of evidence."

He told me a story, out of the history of Iceland. It can be read in almost any library of the United States, for he quoted largely from the sagas of Eric the Red and Leif the Lucky. The beginning was with Eric's voyage to Greenland, after he had been exiled for murder from Norway, then from Iceland, and gave to his bleak new home what he thought was a good name to attract colonists.

To Greenland and Eric's colony came the sorceress Thorbiorg at the invitation of the pagan settlers, to prophesy for them the fate of their venture. Even her description descends to modern time—a dark blue cloak, a hood made of the fleece of a black lamb, a necklace of glass beads, a jewel-headed staff, a leather pouch full of charms. On her second evening she asked for help, someone to sing the chants of power, and nowhere in that colony were there sibyls or warlocks.

Gudrid, a girl of the colonists, said: "Although I am neither skilled in the black art nor a sibyl, yet my foster-mother, Hall-dis, taught me in Iceland that spell-song, which she called Warlocks."

"Then are thou wise in season," applauded Thorbiorg, but the girl demurred. "This is an incantation and ceremony of such a kind that I do not mean to lend it any aid," she said, "for that I am a Christian woman."

BUT her friends and relatives pleaded with her until she consented to help, and Gudrid sang, "so sweet and well" that the sorceress thanked her for the song. "She has indeed lured many spirits hither," said Thorbiorg, "those who were wont to forsake us hitherto and refuse to submit themselves to us." She prophesied glibly about an end to famine and disease; but the following year, the winter after Leif's first voyage to shores which must have been Canadian, there was an epidemic in Greenland that had horrible aspects. One woman who died and was buried rose and walked in the night, so that only a spell involving the holding of an axe before her could make her return to her grave. Thorstein, son of Eric, also returned after death to say that Christian burial rites must be practised for all funerals to prevent such phenomena.

Thunstone paused in his story, looking at me significantly. "You have, then, the story of Gudrid—a sane and honest and well brought up young person—being prevailed upon to perform a rite of black magic she had learned in Iceland and which she did not particularly believe. After that came supernatural terror. What's the thought in your mind?"

"My friend Andy," I said at once. "He was sane and normal, and in Iceland he learned—"

"Exactly," broke in Thunstone, slapping his great hand down on his knee. "Using him in what they're doing will be a triumph to them. A thousand years ago in Greenland, magic was used to start a whole series of ugly events."

"Including the discovery of America before Columbus?" I put in. "Was that ugly?"

"It was a failure, at least. They went to Vineland the Good only a few times, and lost touch. America was found for us by Columbus and his Spaniards, who while sailing called on the saints, not the devils, with almost every breath. But to get back to the sagas and their accounts—"

He told about the voyage to Vineland of Karlsefni, of how the pagan prayers of Thorhall brought a whale to the hungry voyagers and of how eating that whale made them sick. There was fighting with the swarthy, broad-faced natives the Norse called Skraelings, who had a weapon that sounded like a bomb—a black ball that exploded loudly when flung. The women of the voyage waited behind a fence while their men fought. Among them was Gudrid, to whom suddenly appeared a woman like herself, with chestnut hair, pale white skin and large eyes.

"What is thy name?" demanded the apparition.

"My name is Gudrid," replied the girl who once had allowed herself to be argued into singing of black magic. "But what is thine?"

"Gudrid!" cried the strange being, and vanished with a crash like that of the Skraelings' strange weapon.

When Thunstone had made an end, I did not wait to be asked a question.

"Gudrid met her doppelganger," I said. "Someone like her in appearance, even in name. It's the story of Andy and myself."

"Exactly," said Thunstone again. "Well, after the battle the explorers sailed back to Greenland. A Christian bishop sailed for Vineland later, and never was heard of again. The Greenland colony itself vanished. But Icelandic magic remained, and

now it makes its return to the shores of this continent once called Vineland."

"You make it sound baleful," I ventured.

"And so it is. A bad beginning's been made, and your friend Andy is involved without knowing why or how. You and I are going to get him out of it, I say, and at once."

V

I KEPT wondering about the school. Three years underground—it seemed incredible, impossible. Thunstone must have read my thoughts, as a surprising number of clever people can.

"The institution's old enough in its beginnings," he said. "I can give you even a reference in medieval history—the career of Saemund inn Frodi Sigfusson, Iceland's great teacher and poet of the eleventh and twelfth centuries."

"All that I can remember," I said, "is that he's credited with writing the Elder Edda."

"He spent years of study on the continent," Thunstone told me. "His friends lost track of him, and a very good priest—St. Jon Ognurdson, later bishop of Holar—went to find him. Saemund bobbed up, but so changed that St. Jon barely recognized him. He even had a new name—Kol. You change your name when you go diabolist, you know."

"I know," I nodded, for I had read about that in Summers, Wickwar, and Margaret Alice Murray.

"He'd attended the *Svartaskoli*, the Black College," went on Thunstone. "It took prayers and holy water and other things—St. Jon's white magic—to restore him. And after that, a nip-and-tuck flight from those who wanted to hang onto him. But he got away, was an ornament in the crown of Iceland's cultural history, and by his escape we know about that school, its terrors, and the way to fight it. Well, the *Svartaskoli's* right on the other side of the wall from us now, or a branch of it, anyway. Are you game for—"

He broke off, and we both stared. Something was happening on that drab wall.

You can see such things over a period of days or weeks, where damp and decay

darkens and cracks and disintegrates a stretch of plaster. But this happened fast, in moments.

All at once a great patch went rotten and porous, and through it seeped a cloud of something.

"Freeze, Stonewall," muttered Thunstone, not even his lips twitching. "Don't move a muscle until I speak. Then—"

I made a statue of myself. My eyes stung with a desire to blink. I fixed them on the vapor. It was dark, oily-seeming, here and there clotting as if with particles of moisture coming together. It made a figure, vaguely human, the half-man-form that is the most terrifying thing of which imagination is capable.

We'd been detected from beyond the wall, then. It had been too much to hope that we would go unguessed. And this that had been sent—it must have power to destroy, or it would not have come. Something else, more terrible, would—

My dry throat convulsed in spite of me. I had kept silent in my time, within touch almost of scouting enemy infantry, but I could not now. I made a noise, a sort of choking rattle. And the cloud turned to me, turned its lumpy half-shaped headpiece as if it had a face and eyes and could see. Its arms, like two streamers of oil smoke, lifted, then paused. It was afraid, or surprised. It shrank back toward the wall from which it had cleared.

"No!" yelled Thunstone.

I never saw a big man move so fast, not even the ex-wrestler who'd taught us his rough-and-tumble school of fighting and killing with bare hands. Thunstone was down on hands and knees, between the thing and the wall, and one fist shot out with a lump of something pale red. He scraped the floor—a mark—he was drawing with chalk, seemingly speeded up like the decay of the wall. He slashed here, angled off there, and was back. The vapory thing turned back to him, and he scrambled off around it. A big rough star of chalk-lines showed all around the bottom of it, where real figures would have feet.

"Recite," said Thunstone. "The beginning of the Gospel of St. John. Do you know it?"

I did know it, or something put the

words into my mind and my mouth. "In the Beginning was the Word," I stammered, "and the Word was—"

BETWEEN the points of the star, Thunstone was dashing in signs, or perhaps letters in an alphabet I had never seen. As I quoted the Gospel, the thing in the center of his diagram quivered and writhed, but did not move. It was rooted, I thought, to the worn floor-boards. Rising to one knee, Thunstone fairly whirled a circle outside his star and the signs. He stood up, panting.

"It's in prison," he told me exultantly. "See what I've done? Instead of drawing the pentacle and circle around us, I got it around it—and there's no passing that set of lines and figures."

"I'm afraid I almost bungled it," I managed to say, and my voice and my knees trembled.

"You didn't mean to, and neither of us knew that the best way to surprise the thing was to rivet its attention on you," Thunstone assured me. "You're the image of Andy, who's the last human being it expected to find here. Its dark mind, or what it uses for a mind, was taken aback, and gave me my chance. Look!"

The thing wavered here and there, but shrank back from the chalk lines, as from electric wires. I half understood that it was confined as stone walls and iron bars could never confine such a thing. "What is it?" I became bold enough to ask. "Where did it come from?"

"From a bottle, in which nasty things were mixed. Men like those we're fighting can make their own crude ghosts and demons. We'll stop that, along with some other things."

Thunstone pointed to the rotted space of plaster. "It would have retreated through there, and warned them in ways they'd understand. Since it's helpless here, we can use its passageway. Best defense is a good offense."

"Get there first with the most," I glibly quoted Bedford Forrest, and Thunstone's great hand clapped my shoulder in approval.

"Pay attention," he bade me solemnly. "We can get in there easily now; but we'll find ourselves among things you can't

imagine, and I can't explain. I speak of a school in a cellar—it won't be a cellar. Once for a few moments I slid into the other world they make, and none of its mysteries are pleasant to solve. But remember this, Stonewall; *the only way they can defeat and destroy you is to awe you into helplessness.*"

"We're both quoting a lot," I replied, as solemnly as he. "I'll give you something from John Bunyan: 'For here lay the excellent wisdom of him that built Mansoul, that the walls could never be broken down nor hurt, by the most mighty adverse potentates, unless the townsmen gave consent thereto.'"

"*The Holy War*," Thunstone identified the passage, and clapped my shoulder again. "And it's true. The most evil spirit is powerless unless you give it power over you. A werewolf shifts his shape back to human if you speak to him boldly, if you even look levelly. A vampire runs from the simple sign of the cross, made with two fingers. The devil's afraid of music, and the Angry Gods died, the whole leash of them, from the negative cause of having no more worshippers. Will you follow my lead? Then come on."

He stepped forward and with a sweep of his hand as at a curtain struck away the decayed plaster. It fell to dust, and if there had been lath or siding beyond, that vanished too. He stooped, strode through, and struck hard at something beyond. As I followed him in, I saw his target lying on the floor in a shadowed little corridor—a man almost as tall as Thunstone, but scrawny and with evil lines in his stunted face. The man wore a star-spangled garment like a gown, and from his untidy head had fallen a cone-shaped cap, like the archaic costume of a sorcerer.

"One of the least important of our opposition," said Thunstone quietly. "He was posted here just to guide that vapor-creature in and out." His left palm massaged his right fist. "When I hit men like that, they don't get up for an hour. It should be enough."

Down the corridor was a single door, marked with a looped cross like an Egyptian sign. Thunstone turned the knob, and the door swung inward with a whispery,

creak. He went down stairs into darkness as black as a pond of ink, and I went with him

VI

NO, IT WAS no cellar. If you choose not to believe me, probably you are going to be easier in mind. We came down the steps, and I am sure that if I had turned to look for them they would have vanished.

I had done what I once learned to do in night operations, closed my eyes tightly to dilate the pupils, and so when I opened them I was able at once to see a little. Every moment I saw a little plainer, and quite plainly enough to suit me.

We were in the open somewhere. The strange ground underfoot was flat, and the flatness extended far. There may have been hills or cliffs in the distance. Here and there grew what I shall call trees, and lower brushy clumps, without a leaf on them. I thought some of them quivered, thought it might have been a conscious blind writhing, like the writhing of half-sleeping snakes.

In the empty dark overhead, what passed here for sky, rode a round moon, and it was the color of blood, as if foretold of the moon at the world's destruction in the Book of Revelations. It gave only the faintest bloody light, outlining nearby banks of dark, filthy clouds. I chose not to believe that those clouds were gigantic vapor-forms of life, bigger and grosser and more grotesque than the man-size entity Thunstone had trapped in his magic chalk-lines.

Thunstone, a pace ahead of me, snapped his fingers for attention, like a bush-guide in the Pacific islands. I followed his intent gaze. Something came toward us.

It seemed as large and strangely shaped as a camel, and it gleamed tallow-pale as with its own inner radiance. After a moment I had the impression of a man on a horse, approaching at a shambling trot. But though the rider might once have been a man, he rode no horse thing.

They were bones, skeleton things, but not clear-cut to the bony anatomy we know in medical schools or museums. Everything was gross, strangely joined, lacking here

and extra there. The beast had earlike juttings to either side of its skull, and below its eye-caverns sprouted a horn, set too far forward to make it a unicorn. It wore a bridle of sorts, but the rider seemed not to guide it. He sat upright in his saddle, as awkwardly arrogant as Don Quixote who had gone over to Satan. I thought he wore a blunt-peaked helmet, then judged that this was part of his bald, polished skull. From the chin-point below the lipless teeth hung a beard, long, lank and white as thistledown. Over his shoulders was draped a cloak of the moon's same bloody red, his left arm wore a shield with a squat, ugly figure for blazonry, and in his right hand he held aloft a spear. All this I saw as he came toward us, with an unhurried noiseless intensity of movement. At perhaps thirty yards he dropped the lance in rest. Its head, that seemed of some rough white stone like the point of a stalactite, aimed full at Thunstone.

If Thunstone had not stood so confidently immovable, I myself might have turned and run, and I cannot think where I could have run to safely. As it was, I was able to draw from my companion some part of the mighty assurance that matched his mighty frame, and I, too, stood fast. The horrid rider on the horrid beast sped at him, upon him—and Thunstone had shot up his massive forearm, striking aside the lance, and was in close with both big hands clutching at the bridle.

HE STOPPED the creature, forcing its bumpy, horned skullhead up and back until its fore hoofs rose and pawed. The two lipless rows of teeth on the rider's bearded face shot apart, and out came a reedy cry. I ran in on the left side, took a glancing blow from the shield that filled the upper space around the red moon with pale swimming stars; but then I got my arms around a bony leg in rattly chain mail, and with a heave in and up I tumbled him out of his saddle. As he fell, and I threw myself upon him, I saw that Thunstone had somehow twisted the steed's head and neck so that it fell uncouthly on its side, with a sickening clatter of bare bones.

Because I was, beyond amazement, I had no sense of wonder at the burst of strength

by which Thunstone achieved that overthrow.

My own capture had dropped his lance, but he flogged at me with the shield bound to his arm. I got my knee on his mailed chest and worked a hand through that white beard—it was coarse and dry as dried grass—to find his throat. There was no throat, only a struggling column of bones joined together, like a spinal column. My fingers recoiled of their own sickness, closed in the beard, and it twitched off of his skeleton jaw, like something gummed on. I would not allow fear, but disgust shook me and made me faint. Somehow I stayed on top, pinning the thrashing body until Thunstone sprang to my side and knelt.

"Thunstone!" wheezed the lipless, fleshless mouth. It needed no lips to articulate that name. "You—"

"You know me," said Thunstone, with a quiet triumph that somehow made everything all right. "I know you, then. Who are you—who were you?"

The misshapen skull shifted and turned its sockets up to me. Deep in their shadows was the hint of real, glaring eyes. The jaw stirred again.

"Stonewall. . . ."

"You know me, too!" I gasped.

"Call him by name," Thunstone bade me quickly.

Only one person beside Thunstone himself had ever called me Stonewall, and I spoke at once.

"Andy," I stammered. "Andrew Jackson Warren. What have they done to you?"

The form I held shuddered and went slack. I heard hoarse breathing, like a dying man struggling for a hold on life as it left him. A hand rose, not to strike or push, but to grope at me, appealing and pitiful. My eyes were sprung all full of tears, and I scrubbed them clear on my sleeve. Then I could see.

It was Andy.

He was trying to sit up, and I crept clear of him. He stared blankly at me and at Thunstone, his wide mouth open in his pallid face. He dabbed at his disordered hair. The red cloak fell from his shoulders. He looked down at the shield he wore, and wriggled it off of his arm.

"Ghaa!" He cleared his throat, and spat

on the ground, near some things like faintly phosphorescent toadstools. "What goes on here?"

THUNSTONE hooked a big fork of a hand under Andy's armpit and set him on his feet. "Of course they'd send him," he said to me. "Send him, changed like this, to blood himself into their horde by killing his rescuers. Try not to puzzle it out too much, Stonewall. This place where we've come isn't logical. It's proof of more dimensions than three, and of more senses than five."

I was thinking of what Thunstone had said about the *Svartaskoli*, and of the years spent there. They had had Andy brief hours, and had changed him to—Thunstone read my thoughts again.

"It wasn't real," he told me. "The old scholars called such thing a glamor, and they didn't mean Hollywood glamor. Things can seem otherwise than they are, to sight and touch. You know about were-wolves, and the 'appearances' in Salem long ago—disguise by sorcery, not by grease-paint or theatrical costume." He smiled down at Andy. "You don't know how much good this has done all hands. Their logic sent you against us, for they sensed our attack; and put you back into the right ranks."

I strolled over to where Thunstone had hurled that riding creature. It lay in a heap of mouldering bones, like some ancient fossils dug up by scientists. I stooped to touch them, and thought better of it.

"What else is standing in the way here?" Thunstone inquired gently of Andy.

Andy shook his head again, slowly, as if to get sense back into it. "Nothing that I know of. Everything's been blurred, like a dream. But they pointed me out here alone. Their orders were definite, anyway, and a moment ago I was set to carry them out."

"Remember Saemund, the Icelandic scholar?" Thunstone reminded me. "St. Jon called him his own name, and he was himself again. We've done just that. Now, Andy, tell us what you know, while it's still even faintly in your mind. Then I want you to go on and forget it."

Andy told, haltingly, as if it was a story

out of his babyhood. The Spoom and one or two others had given him a book to read, in characters that were provocatively mysterious but which clarified as if his effort to decipher them made them more easy. And he grew foggier and dreamier, and gathered ideas that seemed at the time like brilliant truths, worth following to death and beyond. Finally they told him to come downstairs, and he did so very wittingly, into the country we now saw. A long trail led to a squat tower, blacker than soot, and inside was his school.

"I was to stay there and learn to be worthy of their fellowship," Andy told us. "Those were the Spoom's words. It was so black inside, charcoal would have made a white mark on the wall. But the books—they had letters of cold fire, like rotten wood—"

"Never mind telling us what they said," interrupted Thunstone. "How many were with you?"

"Two others, I think. We weren't to speak to each other. Only study. Once a hand came from somewhere, all shaggy with gray hair, and put down food. I didn't eat it."

"Probably a good thing," I ventured. "Three students—not much of a university, Mr. Thunstone."

"Harvard was no larger in the beginning," replied Thunstone sententiously. "One more question, Andy. Which way is this tower where you entered the primer class of the *Svartaskoli*?"

Andy pointed silently into the dark distance behind him.

"Come," said Thunstone, and stepped out lightly and swiftly as the biggest of all cats.

We followed side by side, Andy and I. It seemed a long, gloomy way, though there was a marked trail underfoot which our feet easily groped upon. Once or twice we passed through ugly thickets, which I fancied were alive and menacing, like ranks of tentacled animals. There was a way up a steep slope, and once we all three scrambled on all fours over a wall of close-set stone that was warm as if from recent fires upon it. I felt a damp wind, and had the sense of great space everywhere.

Thunstone stopped at last, under a

mighty overhanging boulder tufted with lichenlike growths, and snapped his fingers as before. We saw what he saw.

The red moon had dropped toward a horizon, not far away. Against it was silhouetted a squat, square tower, black, to quote Andy, as soot. The damp wind blew from that direction.

VII

THE purpose of all military training is success in battle, and there are a myriad sciences toward that success. If you have been an infantryman, you have learned how best to approach a hostile building.

Thunstone must have been an officer once, with plenty of experience in the front lines. He knew and did everything admirably.

He even knew the silent motions, nudges and signs by which to give us orders. We crept, belly to the gritty soil, on a long dim circle to the right that brought us around and in toward the tower. I wished for a weapon—an M-1, a carbine or a BAR—on that approach crawl. Then I reflected that Thunstone had a master plan that involved no rifles.

He went ahead, leading us to the right, then in. We kept the tower between us and the red light of the sinking moon. It showed us two scrubby trees like gnarled talons spread upward, and then it showed us moving figures. These were human, or probably human. Two of them stood beside the tower, by the door, as if conversing. The other, a hunched thing with skinny long arms that hung almost to the ankle, stood to one side, as if guarding something that lay on the ground. At last one of the two moved to this hunchback, with a gesture and apparently a word. I guessed that this speaker was the Spoom, for he showed small and slim, with a suggestion of elegance in position and movement. The long arms of the hunchback scooped up something, a tray, and waddled toward the tower and in.

"The food," whispered Andy, faint as thought, in my ear.

I remembered what he said about the shaggy gray hair on the hands of the food-bringer, and hoped that if I came into close

conflict with that thing I could make a quick job of it.

The two who had spoken had a final word together, and one of them started in our direction, along the trail we had followed.

Thunstone scrambled back to us, and in less than six words gave us our orders. I lay flat on the trail. Thunstone, a few feet ahead, made his big body small as possible behind one of those filthy-seeming bushes. Andy, on the opposite side of the trail, found a hummock behind which he took cover like the good soldier he had learned to be. The man came briskly along, whistling something minor. He was not the Spoom, too squat and ruggedly built.

He did not see me until he was almost upon me, and I sprang to my feet. Of course he stopped dead. I think he would have yelled, but Thunstone and Andy were upon him from both sides. I saw the darting chop of Thunstone's big hand, edge in, to the fellow's throat. That bruising wallop on the adam's apple quiets anybody. A moment later Andy had pinned the enemy's elbows from behind, and Thunstone hit him four or five times, to head and body. I could hear Thunstone grunt with the effort. When Andy let go, the man dropped as limply as an old rag.

We clustered around him. Thunstone's face was close enough to me to let me see his grin of savage relish.

"I know him," he whispered. "A fool, of course—nearly everyone in business like this is a fool or a tricked victim, as they planned to make Andy."

He gave the forward sign, and we headed towerward again.

THE one remaining outside was the Spoom, all right. He was humming the same song that our late objective had whistled. Thunstone, still leading, gained cover within twenty yards of him. Then he stood up and walked swiftly forward. Andy and I did likewise, but kept behind.

"Hello, Thunstone," said the Spoom, with an affectation of quiet cordiality. "We knew you'd be in this. You've come awfully close."

"I like to get close to my work," replied Thunstone.

"I see," and the Spoom's head-silhouette nodded. "You've come so far by brash, brainless audacity, and probably a few wallops with those big fists. You think you can crush me like a fly? But I'm no fly, Thunstone."

"A spider," amended Thunstone.

The Spoom nodded again. "I accept the compliment. A spider. A blood-drinking spider. I'll drink your blood, Thunstone—figuratively. And it'll be drunk literally, and your flesh eaten, by some of the native fauna of this little pleasure ground. All I have to do is whistle a note through my fingers and they'll be here."

"I'm safe for the moment, then," said Thunstone, and edged around the Spoom. "You won't dare whistle them up unless you can get inside to safety, or they'll eat you, too. As long as I stay between you and the door—"

"I've always admired your ability to find things out," said the Spoom. "You ought to be in with us. Really you ought. You'd have fun here."

"This place," said Thunstone, "is a dream. It's here because an attitude of mind creates it. I don't live in dreams, not this kind of dream, anyway. We're going to wake up the dreamer."

"Your friends are still shy," put in the Spoom, and laughed quietly. He had a master flair for restrained drama.

"If you insist on meeting them—" Thunstone beckoned us. "Come on, gentlemen."

We marched quickly in, shoulder to shoulder, and the Spoom turned to gaze at us. At the same moment Thunstone struck a match.

I saw the Spoom's mouth open, his eyes goggle. In the light of the match Thunstone held, his face turned whiter than wax. He tried to say something, and achieved only a bat-squeak. Then:

"Not two!" he wailed. "Not two!"

Maybe he fainted. Thunstone caught him and picked him up.

"Come on," he said, and rushed at the tower. It seemed made of earth, as if whittled out of a great natural mound of claylike consistency. Even the door was like that, perhaps its hinges. Thunstone threw the Spoom like a javelin, and the door broke all to pieces.

We were inside, lighting more matches. There was a little entry, and in one corner wriggled and cowered the hunchback, holding the tray in front of him. He wore no clothes that I could see, only a thick coat of grizzly hair.

"He's blind," said Thunstone. "Look, inside this place is wood—old wood, older than the first planks ever sawn in America."

He touched a match to the wall, and it kindled like candlegrease. Someone yelled farther inside—one of Andy's ex-school-fellows, I suppose. We backed out into the open, and it wasn't the open.

It was a cellar now, a cellar such as you find under many old houses in New York. The walls were of crumbly cement, there was a mass of trash everywhere. From the direction we had just quitted, and to which we now turned, beat a wall of flame, healthy red flame as in a monstrous fireplace.

"The stairs," said Andy, and pointed. "We can get out."

"Wait." I panted, and bent to look at something lying among the trash. "It's the Spoon. Here, too. Help me lift him."

Thunstone's hand closed on my shoulder and plucked me up and away.

"But he'll die in that fire!" I protested.

"Certainly he will!" Thunstone snapped. "Fire in this world, and fire in the next—that's the judgment on him!"

He rushed me up the stairs, and Andy followed. We were in the corridor we had once seen, and Thunstone poked me through the hole in the wall into the room behind the stationery stand.

VIII

ON THE floor of the room showed a rough figure in chalk, a star, some letters and a circle. There was nothing, not the slightest suggestion of anything, in its center. Thunstone scuffed the lines away with his heel.

"So much for the Spoon's magic," he said. "Do you understand what happened?"

"I do," I said. "A little. You said down there that the place was a dream place."

"Dreamed up—in the strictest sense of the word," nodded Thunstone. "Normally, we have a bookshop and a cellar beneath

it. Some individuals with warped impulses and a decidedly unusual pattern of thought get together and read things and make complicated ceremony-gestures. The cellar becomes a subterranean country, full of abnormal conditions and objects. Frightening, unspeakable—but if it's that easy to create, it's that easy to destroy."

"The Spoon made it?" ventured Andy, and Thunstone nodded again.

"He considered himself master of all magic. What paralyzed his mind was the sudden sight of you two. Somewhere along the line you decided that your duplication wasn't coincidence, but a depart of a deliberate plan. You were right."

"Why couldn't he stand the two of us?" asked Andy.

"Because he knew he had lost power over the one by the freedom of the other. You were aware, too, of the belief that doubles are a curse. They were this time—a curse on the Spoon. He had not expected any such opposition to him. He wanted all the supernatural on his side. When you popped in on him together—"

"He folded up," finished Andy. "Quit. Blacked out."

"And everything he had charmed up for himself was ruined. We had a few seconds to set the fire, which always makes everything clean."

Outside we heard voices, commotion and gongs. Thunstone led us out through the shop into the street.

"Fire engines?" he inquired mildly of an excited fat hotsewife.

"The bookshop around the corner," she chattered. "It's blazing like tinder. Firemen say they can save the shops around it, but that nice man that runs the place—Mr. Spoon—he and his friends are caught inside—they'll never be got out—"

"I see." Thunstone strolled away, and we with him.

"It's almost dinner time," he told us, "and I've an invitation. Won't you two come along? Several others will be there. A little Frenchman named de Grandin, who will want to hear all about this. And," he smiled, "my host has daughters. Two strikingly beautiful girls. They're identical twins—can't be told apart."

"Let's go!" cried Andy.



Re: Twice Cursed

THE way that Seabury Quinn and Manly Wade Wellman chat in their stories about meeting each other and consulting each other and so forth, made us feel as if we should say that Quinn came into the office and remarked that he'd met Wellman on the street and he'd asked him to give us the following letter about Wellman's story in *WEIRD TALES*. As a matter of fact, however, Wellman came in himself unannounced by Quinn and left us some interesting notes about *Twice Cursed*—the story, not the weather or editors and authors in general. Wellman said:

Truth is so completely universal that it seems logical to suspect universality of containing truth. Others have touched on beliefs that bob up in every land, culture and age—lycanthropy, vampirism, organized demonolatry. But as universal a legend as any, and perhaps it is not a legend, is that of the ghostly double, more real than ordinary nature can supply, and the tremendous results that follow one's coming face to face with such a living mirror. Plenty has been written about the *doppelgänger*—read Edgar Allan Poe, Fiona MacLeod and Anthony Hope for some of the best. For two beings to have the same aspect is as frightening, perhaps, as for one being to have two aspects.

Some things in this story—*Twice Cursed*—actually happened. Other things are varnished, to make them shine a little brighter as fiction. One need not seek too painstakingly in New York for a bookshop like the Sporn, though under a different name, and



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find the books there that are mentioned in this account. For translations from the Icelandic I am chiefly indebted to Leon Minshall, and the magic and counter-magic are mostly charms from my often-used and often-quoted Albertus Magnus, as done into English more than a hundred years ago. Other books, unfortunately, do not need translation.

It is strange and probably unfortunate that we must go to Iceland, that remote land that the ancients thought was Thule, the nation of wizards, for the only comprehensive account of the medieval *Svartaskoli*. It may well be that there was only one such institution in all time and space, and that St. Jon Ognurdson was the only scholar who backslid from its teachings and turned normal and wholesome again; but I venture to suggest that many such schools existed and do exist. Father Montague Summers traces them in South America today, an active and baleful influence, and several of us are sure that the frightened children who testified in the Salem witch-trials had been started in the primary grades of a similar institution.

It does not pay us to accept all of these things unless we have seen them face to awful face, as has, for instance, John Thunstone. Life today has enough of accepted terrors and woes without searching out others, and perhaps the fight against entrenched and organized black magic is best left in the hands of Thunstone and his few but determined helpers. He likes to be kept busy, and he shall be kept busy.

Even if he deals with those traitors to the human race who worship in the wrong temples, there are always the Shonokins.

Manly Wade Wellman

Incidentally, Wellman announced that an idea was germinating for another Thunstone story, and we gave the go-ahead nod. The customers seem to like him, said we.



"SHONOKIN TOWN" a new horror novelette by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

WEIRD Tales

JULY

15¢



"CATSPAWS"—a Jules de Grandin—SEABURY QUINN

Shonokin Town

THE face of Dr. Munford Smollett had once been round, but now it looked fallen in and haggard, like a badly baked pie, and one taut cheek was furrowed with scratches. His thick gray hair, probably never well groomed, hung in a tussock over his seamed forehead. When John Thunstone, at the door of his hotel suite, held out a great hand, Dr. Smol-

lett seized and held it as though it were an anchorage in a reeling world.

"I came at once," he said hoarsely. "At once, as soon as I'd checked my bags at the station and crossed streets back and forth to make sure I wasn't followed. Sir, you won't believe what I am going to tell."

"I've believed many wonders in the past," Thunstone assured him, and drew

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE



BY MANLY WADE WELLMAN

him through the door to a comfortable chair. "Please sit down. I judge that you need a drink."

"Thanks," said the doctor, and when Thunstone mixed the highball he drank in just such a greedy fashion as he would deplore in a patient. The glass shook in his hand, but color came back into his drawn face, and he spoke more clearly. "It was at a town called Araby. Do you know of it?"

"Start somewhere near the beginning,"

Thunstone bade him. "So far I know only what you phoned—your name and that you're in trouble."

"Trouble—and not natural trouble, not trouble from normal nature—"

"You're safe here. Near the beginning, doctor."

Dr. Smollett drank again. Thunstone refilled his glass, and mixed a drink for himself.

"I was taking a special holiday," said Dr. Smollett slowly. "I'd been working

A town of unfathomable evil, an unhealthy and unholy place. . . .



hard and prescribed a complete change for myself. I'd heard there wasn't much of a tourist rush upstate. Somewhere or other I'd learned of nice remote hideaways in the neighborhood of Zoar Valley."

"Zoar, yes," nodded Thunstone, remembering the tale of how once children were born there under a curse, with two-toed hoofs for feet and two-fingered crab-claws for hands. "You went there?"

"By train, cross-country bus and again by a little spur of railroad." Dr. Smollett's throat twitched. "I was being completely careless. Wanted to drop casually into the quietest spot. The timetable said Araby, and a ticket-man in a little station said it was a flagstop only. So I asked to be let off, and dropped at a little stone shanty of a station, with a bag in each hand. And the impossible part began."

"There are no impossibilities," said Thunstone, speaking like an oracle to hearten his visitor. "What happened?"

Thunstone, immense and vital, knew how to study assurance into the great dark rectangle of his face. His eyes were steady, bright, interested, his mouth firm without tenseness below the trim black mustache. It was acting, but it served the purpose. Dr. Smollett borrowed some degree of composure from his host, and went on calmly.

"Maybe I've imagined things later, the way you imagine things to add into simple dreams. Now that I think, I guess the first men I saw in Araby—should I call them Arabians?—didn't frighten or even perplex me. One thin old fellow was lounging on the shady side of the shanty-station. His clothes were somehow peculiar; cut and worn right, even nattily—but their material was new to me. Not any fabric I knew, maybe not fabric at all. It was like skin, and not dressed skin, either, but suggested living integument, white and sheeny. Here, Thunstone, I may be piecing out with imagination."

"Perhaps," nodded Thunstone, who thought otherwise. "You spoke to the old man? How did he look?"

"A grand specimen. I'm a doctor, I appreciate good quality of body. He was old, but not decrepit. His hair was gray, not as gray as mine, and thick as a horse's mane. Worn mane-fashion, too, square-cut

behind and a big sweeping lock over the brow. Dark face, wrinkled, but not loosely. The body was thin and wiry strong. I held out my hand to introduce myself, and he took it—"

"Stop right there," commanded Thunstone. "How did his handclasp affect you? Don't worry about imagination. Tell me."

"It was as strong as a closing trap," said Dr. Smollett. "Dry and cool for the warm morning, yet no impression of ill health. Fingers long, tapering, hard as hard rubber—"

"Was there anything unusual about the fingers?"

SMOLLETT paused and his throat worked again. "Yes. I sensed it then, and made sure later. The third finger, the ring finger, was excessively long. I never saw its like before, longer than the middle finger. How do you know about it?"

"Go on," urged Thunstone, without making reply to the question.

"I said my name was Dr. Smollett, and the old fellow dropped my hand as if it had scorched him. I was looking past him at the scene. The town was little and old and pretty—a well-mended place, if you know what I mean. The houses were mostly white, with low roofs like hats pulled well down, and they were grouped curiously, as if the streets weren't straight or crossed at right angles. The effect was like a modernistic stage set. Beyond rose the slope of a big hill, almost a mountain, and on it were trees, belt on belt of them, rich and green and with that upward-marching effect you get with a wooded incline. I said I liked the place. I asked where I might lodge for a few days.

"The old man shook his head. His gray mane stirred. He said, deeply and gently, that Araby had no accommodations for strangers."

Thunstone, watching the doctor closely, offered a cigar.

"Thanks." Smollett lighted a match. "Well, he was strange, but not unfriendly. I still wanted to stay. It struck me that the local medico might extend hospitality to a colleague, so I asked where a doctor lived. The old man jumped back from me, staring. I saw that his eyes—his eyes—"

"Had perpendicular pupils?" prompted Thunstone.

"How did you know? Thunstone, you have been in Araby!"

"Never. Go on."

"He stared. His lips twitched. He had pointed teeth. He said, 'No doctors here. We have no doctors in Araby.'"

"That intrigued me. 'Then,' I said, 'I might consider opening an office here. It looks like a pleasant little town.'"

"He still glowered. 'Never have been doctors here,' he said. 'We heal things our own way. Don't want doctors.' And I thought he was going to spit at me, like an angry cat."

Smollett sighed and went on: "I figured him for a crank, and walked on past him with my luggage. I was looking for a place to pause, a store or tavern. Several men lounged together in front of a big square house. They all wore those white skin-stuff suits, they all seemed dark and spare and lithe, and they all were looking my way. I paused, gazing up and down, a little worried. Then the old man strode quickly past me. I wish I had energy like that—no, I don't. It wasn't human energy."

He was nervous again. Thunstone put a mighty hand on his shoulder. "I said you were safe here," he reminded. "I want the whole story."

"Things happened so fast they're hard to tell," said Dr. Smollett. "I may leave something out, or imagine something in. The old man spoke to the others—short words, in a language I don't know, and they jumped at me, fast and fierce as mad dogs."

"One hit me in the face, slapping and scratching," Dr. Smollett lifted his hand and touched the marks on his cheek. "He had long nails, and a long third finger. I felt disgusted and sick. I tried to back away, but they were all over me, grabbing at my arms and shoulders. They would have dragged me down, but I swung one of my heavy bags, with all my strength, at the head of the biggest. You should have seen him fall. Like a wet coat with nothing inside it. He lay still. The others all screamed and yelled and shrank back. I got myself and my bags into the little station-shanty, and slammed the heavy door

shut. There was a big latch, and I put it into place.

"I thought quietly. There wouldn't be a train for hours, perhaps not until next day. I knew I hadn't any friend, or anyone willing to be a friend, in the whole town of Araby. I wondered if I could stand siege against these men who for no reason seemed anxious to kill me. They were talking outside, in undertones. Then one scratched outside the door, like a dog wanting to come in. It was the old man. He said there had been a mistake, and they wanted to apologize."

"You believed that?" demanded Thunstone sharply.

"I was only too glad to. I opened the door, and they swarmed all around me again. They grabbed me, and held me. One of them pointed to where something lay. The man I had hit. He said I was a murderer."

"I got my nerve together, and argued that I had struck in self-defense. Then the old man reminded me that I had said I was a doctor. He told me that I must treat the fellow I'd hit, and make him well. I was glad to do that, and I took one of my bags, the one with my medicines and instrument. I went to the side of the fallen man. None of them followed me. They seemed to strain away, in absolute horror."

"Of course, of course," muttered Thunstone, more to himself than to Smollett. "The one thing that—but don't let me interrupt."

"I knelt by the man. His face was a sort of dusky, bloodless, buckskin color now. Blood showed at his ears and nostrils, and his eyes were open, and one of those slit-shaped pupils was wider than the other. Skull fracture, I knew, and even before I touched him I felt that he was dead. I made sure in a few seconds. The metal fittings on my bag must have struck his temple and smashed it in. I turned around and said to the others, 'He's dead. Help me carry him to the station.'"

"THEY all shrank away from me. They looked even more bloodless than their dead friend. I said, 'He can't just lie here. Help me,' and I stooped and got him into my arms somehow. He wasn't

small or light, but I managed alone. I carried him to the station, and inside, and laid him on a stone bench there. When I came back to the door, they had all retired to the houses, in a horrified knot. They stared at me, and whispered toward each other out of the sides of their mouths. When I came into the open, they scuttled clear away, and gazed at me from a distance, like frightened puppies.

"I'd had enough then. I took my cases and started to walk along the track. Two of them followed me far off, but once when I stopped and turned around, they stopped, too. They seemed set as if to fight or run, but they didn't move after me until I started along. We came through a narrow pass in the hills, and the railroad paralleled a highway. A truck came along, and I hurried to the highway and thumbed a ride.

"I talked to the truck driver. Told him almost everything except about the man's death. He said, 'Araby? Oh, those ducks.' He seemed to know that they were queer, and he seemed not to want to know anything else. The way people are about convict labor camps or insane asylums near their homes. He took me to where I could catch my bus, and from the bus I caught a train to New York. On the train were two of those Araby men, in their strange suits, with their intent faces peering after me. They'd followed. I sat in a crowded smoking car all night. I got here, telephoned you, and I hope I shook them off my trail when I came here. Mr. Thunstone, people say you know more than almost anyone else about the strangest things of life. What is Araby, and what are its citizens?"

"Do you remember hearing anything about the Shonokins?" asked Thunstone in turn.

"Shonokins? Shonokins? Oh, the legend—"

"Don't you know now that they aren't a legend? That's a Shonokin community. I've barely heard of it, and you've done me a favor by telling me about it."

"But Shonokins are a nature myth, an Indian story like Hiawatha."

"Hiawatha was a real man, and the Shonokins are real—real almost-men. I've seen several. I've examined them. What you tell matches what I know about them.

Those long third fingers, those strange clothes. Their peculiar knowledges and sciences, that make them distrust our medicine and other skills. And they fear only their own dead. Because, so far as I can learn, nobody ever saw a Shonokin die except accidentally or violently."

"How does science explain that?" demanded Dr. Smollett.

"Science doesn't recognize the existence of Shonokins, let alone try to explain them. Would science take seriously the report of a race that had no females as far as anyone knows?"

"I didn't see any women, at that," mused Smollett.

"Creatures with eyes and hands like that? Creatures that, for all they look like human beings, aren't human beings? Aren't descended from the same original beasts as ourselves, but were a different stock, branching off in ages we cannot define? Who say that they've lain in hiding enough centuries, and want to start quietly and deliberately to possess the world they insist was always theirs?"

"How do you know that's their way?" asked Smollett. "Or do you really know, are you doing more than guessing?"

"I know some things, and guess others. Dr. Smollett, I want your promise of silence for the time being. You need rest now, and pleasant companions, and safety. I want you to spend two or three days as the guest of some friends of mine."

They went in a taxi to the home of a man who came to the door in a robe like that of a priest, but dark green instead of black. He greeted Thunstone as one brother will greet another with whom he is on excellent terms. He was eager, but not surprised, when Thunstone introduced Dr. Smollett and asked if he might stay. The three had dinner, drinks and considerable pleasant talk. Thunstone went away, alone, to the office of a railroad executive. He introduced himself by mentioning the name of a man known and admired by both himself and the railroader.

"The favor I want," said Thunstone, "is to ride on a little spur line your railroad operates in the Zoar Valley region. I'm going up there tonight by airplane. I want to approach Araby, but not to stop there.

Let your train slow down at a point I'll designate, so that I can drop off just outside the town."

THEY granted Thunstone's request of course. He never makes requests without reason, and without knowing those requests will be granted. He flew to the Zoar Valley country without hand luggage, though his pockets were stuffed with various things, and was in plenty of time for the train that left a small division point in the evening to travel the spur toward Araby.

It was a mixed train, with an ancient passenger coach, a milk car, two freight cars and a caboose. The wise-looking old conductor had on his sleeve four gold stripes for twenty years of service. He shook hands with Thunstone and sat beside him in the passenger coach, talking. Thunstone asked him no questions, but what the conductor told him might have been a series of helpful answers.

"Araby's an old town. I never get off there, never have. Somebody has a deal with the line to act as station master, though it's only a flagstop. Sometimes they take off freight, though they never put any on. Once in months, one or two of them will get on or off. Peculiar, yes, but the world's full of peculiar people. Never pass the time of day. Pay their passage in money, not tickets. Mostly in old coins, dollars and half dollars; once in a while in bills. The bills look new. I was worried a couple of times and had a bank check the bills for counterfeit. They were good, though."

"Naturally," said Thunstone.

"Unnaturally," rejoined the old conductor. "Araby's an unnatural place. Nobody goes there. Maybe the sheriff would, but there's never any trouble to call him. No telegraph, no phone, no newspaper I ever heard of. They have a deal with the government, too, like the deals Indian tribes have, to be let alone. Don't know how they worked it. They aren't Indians."

"No, they aren't," agreed Thunstone.

The conductor squinted through his spectacles at the scenery going past. It was after sundown, and to Thunstone the night looked black; but, like all railroaders on familiar routes, the conductor knew where he was.

"We'll be there in five minutes," he said. "Usually we highball through, but we'll take it at about thirty miles an hour. Two miles past, there's a little cut-through, full of trees. We slow to about fifteen there, and out you can go. Good-bye, Mister. You know what you're doing."

"I know," Thunstone assured him.

The conductor got up. Thunstone followed him up the aisle and paused in the entry of the car. He watched as the train rolled to the edge of Araby and through. There were houses against a night-gloomy slope, as Dr. Smollett had described. They had lights, very few and dim and reddish, as if shining through colored glass. Thunstone walked down the steps of the car, his huge hand on the cleat at one side. The train cleared Araby and cut its speed. It came to a curve, plunged in between close heights. That would be the cut-through. Thunstone poised himself on the bottom step, waited for his instinct to speak, and sprang into the darkness.

For all his size and weight, he landed lightly on his feet, like a cat. Quickly he knelt on mossy ground among bushes, and waited for the train to gather speed and vanish with its lights that might disclose him. Then he flexed his muscles to rise, but at once he crouched lower. The ground under his knee gave a tiny vibration—something was coming, cautiously and slowly.

Thunstone waited motionlessly. A bush rustled. His eyes, growing accustomed to the darkness of the cut-through, made out a moving silhouette, upright and smaller than himself. It was pausing, then moving ahead, its head turning this way and that as if peering in the night. Not five yards from Thunstone the figure stopped. He heard it clear its throat, and then a match flared to light a cigarette.

HE SAW a hatless head of brown hair, an aggressive young face, an open-collared blue shirt with sleeves rolled almost to the shoulders over arms that were sinewy but not bulky. This was no Shonokin.

Thunstone crept forward at a crouch, then pounced with massive speed. His two mighty hands fell on the youngster's biceps

and closed like manacles, holding his captive helpless.

Match and cigarette fell and went out. Towering above the young man, Thunstone spoke quickly.

"Don't move, or I'll pull your arms out at the shoulders. Where did you come from, and who are you?"

In the dark sounded a little chuckle, from nervousness or ordinary good humor. A gentle young voice made reply:

"I dropped off that train, just like you. And my name's Kent Collins. You can call me Crash, Mr. Thunstone."

"Crash?"

"A nickname I got when I played football. You'll find it tattooed on my left arm. I came because I wanted to help you."

The youth who called himself Kent Collins was well grown—perhaps five feet ten inches tall, and all of a hundred and sixty-five pounds in weight—but plainly he realized that he would have no chance against the giant Thunstone. He did not move in Thunstone's grip, did not even tense his imprisoned biceps. "I was hoping," he said, "that you'd see my match light and come over. I don't blame you for not trusting me."

"Lighting a match hereabouts is foolish," Thunstone told him sententiously. "And why should I trust you?"

"You shouldn't until I prove myself. I'll try that. I know a little about you, and a little less about why you're here. But I do know something about both. I'm a friend of Dr. Smollett."

"So you say," said Thunstone.

"Several of his friends knew how tired he was, and were a little afraid he might collapse. When he went on that vacation, I agreed with some of the others to go along—not where he'd see, but in sight of him if he needed help."

"Didn't you think he needed help in Araby, Collins?"

"Call me Crash, Mr. Thunstone. I dozed through Araby, and when I woke up he was gone and the train pulling away. I jumped off at just about this point, and headed back toward town. I was in time to see him in trouble—out of it again—and running."

"What did you do?"

"Shivered." Crash Collins suited action to word. "So would you, Mr. Thunstone—no, they say you never shiver. They say you'd look the devil himself in the eye and call him a liar. But I shivered. I crouched down in some bushes by the track, until another train came along. I saw two of the Shonokins flag it down and get on. I made a run and caught the rear rail. They didn't pay attention to me, they were busy whispering together. I got off and followed them when they made a change to a New York train. Dr. Smollett was on that train, and they watched him so closely that they didn't notice me. He shook them off his trail and came to you, and I was right behind him. I heard everything the two of you said, at your hotel and later at—"

"You heard?" repeated Thunstone.

"There's a fire escape outside your window, Mr. Thunstone."

Thunstone relaxed his grip. "I heard a noise there, but I ignored it."

"Should you have ignored it?" inquired the gentle voice.

"I could afford to. The room where I live has—various devices." Thunstone decided not to enter into descriptions. "They would warn me of any danger or spying close at hand by supernatural enemies."

"Like the Shonokins," suggested Crash Collins.

"Exactly. What you tell me is enough to show that you're not in with them, at least. You may be honest about the rest of it, and you may not. But you're a normal human being, and no more than that."

"You make me sound run-of-the-mill," sighed Crash Collins. "I really want to help you. I haven't anything else to do in life. No family, no job of any importance—"

"My advice to you is to get out of here," Thunstone cut him off. "Head up the track and away from Araby. Now and then men find themselves idle and bored, and mix into adventures like this. They're a thousand times more in peril than the business man who fired ten shots at a mark and goes into the African wilds to hunt man-eating lions."

"Please," begged Crash Collins. "I'll do anything you say—"

"What I say is for you to get away from here," Thunstone interrupted again. "I

need all my eyes and thoughts for the Shonokins, without protecting you. If you're honest in wanting to help, I'm honest in telling you that you may be more trouble than good. Sorry, I can't be more polite than that. Leave me alone."

Crash Collins shrugged and turned away. Thunstone moved in the direction of the Shonokin town.

THERE was noise from the town, not loud or definite. Perhaps he would not have heard it so far off if he had not expected to hear it.

It was not singing, though instruments of some sort played, and voices sounded in rhythm. They chanted and kept time, without musical tones. Thunstone had heard performances like that, once or twice, in concerts peculiarly planned and sponsored, that claimed to forecast the music of the future. His musical education was as good as the next layman's, but he had always felt baffled, repelled and in some sort dismayed. Now he wondered if the concerts were given by persons who knew something about Shonokin pseudo-music.

He thrust his hands into one pair of pockets, then another, to check the things he had brought along. Two talismans in particular he made sure of—a round gold case smaller than a coin, in which was sealed something said to be the eye of a bat, pierced and embalmed. The other was a dark leather thumb stall, which he now produced and slid upon his huge right thumb. It had been made, the giver had told him, from the ear of a black cat that had been boiled in the milk of a black cow and otherwise treated. Both talismans were credited with the power to make their bearer invisible. Thunstone did not wholly accept this claim, at least he did not think it could be done without the recital of words and the making of gestures he did not care to try; but they could and would baffle counter-charms that might betray his whereabouts and motives to watchers in Araby.

The street he came to was as smooth and level as a dance floor, but not slippery. The Shonokins had strange materials and tools, for paving and other things. To one side grew a sort of hedge, of tall tufted reeds, and Thunstone hugged it, stealing quietly

along. He came to a point opposite one of the houses with reddish lights inside, and paused, but could see nothing through the clouded panes. He moved on toward another, then dropped to his knee. He parted his lips to relax pressure on his ear-drums, listening.

Movement. There was a rush of movement behind him. He swivelled around, still kneeling, and drove a hand under his coat for one of several weapons he had chosen as probably effective against such enemies. But they were not coming toward him. They swirled and struggled in a group yards away on his back track. He saw their pallid garments, their flourishing arms.

"Take that, you damned—"

There was a dull *chock* of a blow, and the voice stopped. But the four words were enough for Thunstone, and the voice. It was Crash Collins, who had brushed aside his warning and had followed. Knowing nothing of Shonokin methods, he had been detected and attacked.

Even now it was too late for Thunstone to charge to his rescue. Thunstone slipped silently through the hedge, and peered between stems. They came along the street, padding quietly like two-legged leopards, five or six of them. In their midst they hustled the staggering, half-stunned figure of Crash Collins. Moving past Thunstone, they walked toward the thicker jumble of houses just beyond. Voices called to them, in the language that Dr. Smollett had been unable to identify, and that Thunstone could identify but not understand.

They had captured the young man, kept him alive. Why?

HE CAME from his hiding and moved quietly in the wake of the group, keeping their pale garments barely in sight. He himself was dressed in dark clothes, could hardly be seen, even by the feline eyes of the Shonokins. Up ahead he heard voices, questioning and answering, as though some sort of a guard challenged the group. Then more Shonokins were joining. They chattered together, all at once and briefly. Falling silent, they turned at a corner and he hurried after them in time to see them toiling up-hill.

He followed again, thankful that this path or trail led away from the houses. The Shonokins, up ahead, were marching their prisoner toward the top of the slope. The way was longish and more than a little steep, so that Thunstone found himself on all fours more than once. But the creatures he followed were sure and quick in the dark and on the slope, and he had to exert himself to keep them in sight.

So hard did he work to climb that he did not watch well enough. A pale-clad figure appeared almost immediately above him, its foot within touch of his hand. It spoke to him, a question in the Shonokin language.

Thunstone, crouching to climb, shot out his hand and grasped an ankle that writhed as if boneless in his grip. The Shonokin might have opened its mouth to cry, but he was too quick and grim. A mighty heave upward, and its feet came out from under it and its head struck dully on the hard paving of the trail. A moment later Thunstone's weight was upon it, and his hands were at its neck. He felt the cords of that neck crawl and writhe under his fingers, like a handful of captive snakes, and hands flashed upward to flesh sharp nails in his cheeks. He did not flinch nor move his head, except to writhe it clear of a groping of those ill-assorted fingers toward his eyes. Into his own hands and forearms he poured his muscular strength, deliberately and knowledgeably. He felt his thumbs sink into the relaxing flesh, as into putty, and the struggles beneath him weakened. The claws slipped down from his face and dabbled ineffectually at his wrists, scraping the skin but not fastening. The Shonokin went slack under him, but it might be a trick. Thunstone clung to his throttle-hold while he counted under his breath, very slowly, up to forty.

Then he let go and rose upward and backward, fumbling for a handkerchief to mop his bleeding face. He listened and peered. The Shonokin made no move and no sound, did not even breathe. He knelt again and fumbled for where its heart might be, then for its pulse. There was no hint of life.

John Thunstone, who had never rejoiced to kill or injure any of the men he had been forced to fight, smiled to himself in

the dark. It was a hard smile, that would have frightened many excellent men and women who thought of John Thunstone as an oversized but gentle scholar. He dragged the body a little down-hill and stretched it full across the trail. No Shonokin would follow him up past the dead carcass of one of its own race. And plainly this one had lingered as a sentry, he could advance without too great fear of rearward watchers above.

He continued his upward climb.

THERE was light above, pallid rather than the sort of strange red glow that had showed at the windows in the town. Thunstone left the trail to move cautiously in bush-clumps. He came close, as close as he dared, and pulled aside some leafy twigs for a look at what might be on the brow of the slope.

The glow showed him a building, at first glance like a castle, at second like those battlemented structures which set off the dam of a reservoir. It was square, with a tower at each corner, and each tower topped with a pointed roof like a nightcap. There were no windows, only a single arched doorway closed with a massive portal that seemed to have neither lock nor latch. From inside, as through an open space where the main roof should be, rose the pallid light, enough to show him everything. Over the building fluttered dark winged creatures—big bats, judged Thunstone.

Close to him, and all facing toward the door of the castle-like structure, were grouped the Shonokins. Among their pale-clad figures, lithe and triumphant, stood the darker, taller figure of Crash Collins. He was bound around the arms with something like a strip of pale, flexible metal.

One of the gathering, gray and consequential, spoke in a deep and authoritative voice.

One of the Shonokins near Collins addressed him:

"He asks your name."

"Kent Collins," was the steady reply. "This is war, I guess, and I'm your prisoner. Conventions of war allow you to ask my name, and say that I can answer."

"And what are you doing here?"

Collins laughed a single syllable. "Con-

ventions of war don't oblige me to answer that. Keep it fair, Shonokin."

The interpreter spoke to his companions in their own language, and they chorused a soft, snarling noise that might have been laughter. The gray Shonokin spoke again, and the interpreter addressed Collins as before:

"He wonders if you are satisfied with what has happened to you."

"Nothing's happened to me yet that I can't stand," replied Collins. "I'm wondering at a lot of things, but I'm not hurt or scared yet."

The boy was a magnificent liar, Thunstone told himself. If Crash Collins was not frightened, then he was a bigger fool than Thunstone took him for. The interpreter translated into Shonokin, listened to yet another query from the gray chief, and turned back to Collins with a new question.

"He asks if you have any prayers to offer to the god you worship."

"Not here and now," replied Collins at once. "I've always thought I should pray more; but since I haven't, it's a poor time to begin when I'm in trouble. Nobody who listens to prayers is going to respect me if I do. And any help I deserve will come my way, pray or not."

"A sophistication," said the interpreter. "You may become less glib as time goes on, Collins. But if you decline to pray in your manner, you will let us pray in ours."

"If I don't have to enter into it."

"But you do have to enter into it, Collins. We'll show you how and when. But watch. It will be the last experience of your life."

DESPITE his own danger, and his apprehension for the youngster who had blundered into the hands of the creatures, Thunstone was fascinated. Worship—the Shonokin had said they would pray to their deity. Thunstone turned over in his mind the suggestion, made to him once by a professor of psychology, that religion was an instinct as deep as any, and not confined to humanity. The vanished race of the Stone Age, the Neanderthal folk that—like the Shonokins—stood erect, used fire and tools and language, but were—like the Shonokins—another breed than man, had

worshipped. Scholars knew that, for they found the ill-shapen bones of Neanderthals in graves, and beside them their weapons and possessions, laid there for use in an after-life. Someone not a psychologist had offered the fancy that the god of the Neanderthals was the being men knew at Satan. . . . However that might be, dogs worship their masters as gods, wild things fear men as devils. Did not the ancient writers about animals credit them with devotion—in the Arabian Nights the beasts swore by Allah, and there were the old stories from Africa about ape-peoples who served at abominable altars. Thunstone himself had visited the cave in Southern France that was maintained as a chapel, because inside it an ox had been found on his four knees before a natural marking in the shape of a cross.

The Shonokins, who are not human, were going to pray.

Collins, bound as he was, did not move or speak until two of his captors led him to a rock and shoved him down to sit upon it. Then he spoke, and in deadly insult. One of the group laughed back, unpleasantly and felinely. Around the gray chief several Shonokins were grouped, helping him into a costume. It included a scarf and what appeared to be an ancient, shabby opera hat. In his hand the chief took a staff, that was adorned at the end with a carven skull from the pate of which sprouted sparse hair, like faded grass. His costuming done, the creature looked like a coarse caricature drawn by a bitter radical artist of a penny-pinching man of wealth—Scrooge, or David Balfour's miserly uncle, or the rich squire who forecloses the mortgage in an old-fashioned melodrama.

Another Shonokin had pulled on a dark robe with a hood, like that of a monk. A third was strapping a belt with an old sword around his waist, and setting on his head a visored cap. And yet another put on something like a mortar-board.

The interpreter lounged by the rock where Collins sat. "Do you feel better?" he asked gently. "More at home, now that you see your friends, the powers that men best admire and trust?"

"I see no friends," replied Collins stoutly, "and none of you see a friend in me."

"Let me introduce you." The interpreter made a truly graceful gesture toward the chief in the top hat. "Here is the man of riches and position in your society, probably the most envied person of your race. Here," and he waved toward the one in the robe, "is your man of religion, your priest. In the sword-belt you see the soldier, your man of might, on whom you depend when force—the final argument—must settle differences. And in the flat hat comes the professor, your man of education."

"They look like a hard times party," sniffed Collins.

HE WAS right. Thunstone knew it, and the interpreter knew it, too, for he emitted a Shonokin laugh.

"I say they are your friends, Collins. You are bound and helpless, and we, the Shonokins, will raise upon you those whom we worship. But these, your own people, the best of your own people, will stand by you to protect you. Can they avail you against our deities? Money, pride, religion, the soldier's sword, the professor's wisdom?"

"Just set my hands free—" began Collins.

"Oh, that stupidity!" cut in the interpreter. "You could not even win free from us, simple Shonokins. How can you oppose the deities? No human being can."

"I can think of one," Collins told him.

"And I can read your mind. Is his name—Thunstone?"

Collins was silent.

"I can read your mind," repeated the interpreter. "We know Thunstone. We have competed with him before this. I will say that you have something of a point—his part of the competition has not been wholly unsuccessful. But he is not here. Nobody is here. Your hopes are—what is your expression?—wishful thinking."

"Maybe," said Collins, and shut his mouth tight.

The interpreter was turning to speak to the other Shonokins. Their language was utterly incomprehensible, full of amazingly complex accentings, perhaps too much for a mouth shaped as a human being's mouth is shaped. Undoubtedly it had its complexity of syntax, too. But here and there was a syllable or an inflection that struck

Thunstone as familiar. He wished that Lovecraft were alive to see and hear—Lovecraft knew so much about the legend of Other-People, from before human times, and how their behaviors and speech had trickled a little into the ken of the civilization known to the wakeaday world. De Grandin, too—a Frenchman, a scientist, and with the double practicality of his race and education. De Grandin would be interested to hear of all this later. Thunstone had no doubt that he would survive to tell de Grandin about it, over a bottle of wine at Huntington, New Jersey.

The Shonokins who were in costume moved away from the others, who squatted expectantly to watch. The priest-mocker lifted a hand and made a sign in the air, not the sign of the cross, but nearly. The other three, the travesties of soldier, scholar and squire dropped to their knees. The priest-Shonokin said something that made the watchers snicker. Plainly a travesty of human religious rites. . . .

Thunstone could have groaned in contempt. He kept silent, but he smiled and his lips made the motion of spitting.

As little of originality and wit as this! The Shonokins had taught it to ancient devil-worshippers, or the ancient devil-worshippers had taught it to the Shonokins. No way of telling, and no particular value in being able to tell. The important thing was that what they called worship was only a reversal, a burlesque, a stupid fatuous rebellion. He had known addled old women who recited the Lord's Prayer backward, a conceited and stuffy pseudo-poet who had hashed together garblings of many ceremonies and called them a new cult of wisdom. These Shonokins were doing the same thing, and not doing it very well. Thunstone debated for a moment the policy of walking right in among them, knocking them down with his boulder-like fists, conquering them at the very door of their strange light-giving temple. Then he stayed right where he was.

WHILE the mock-ceremony went on with the four costumed ones, another Shonokin walked slowly and stiffly toward the four-towered building. His arms were lifted, his fingers trembled and twitched.

As he came close, he raised his voice, not in speech or in song, but in a cry. It was musical, prolonged and steady, like a blast from a bugle.

The bat-things in the upwash of light fluttered, swirled, and sailed away as if carried by a blast of wind. Something darker than the material of the walls rose into sight, midway between the towers.

It was a head, with horns upon it. A moment more, and it was joined by another horned head.

"You see?" the interpreter prompted Collins. "Other human beings have seen, too, but have not gone away to describe the sight. They come for you, that pair, but why should you be afraid? The greatest powers of the human race stand between you and them."

And indeed the five burlesque-makers had ceased their travesty on religious service, and were drifting toward Collins. They formed around him in a purposeful-seeming group, facing toward the building. Their bodies seemed tense and hostile inside their ridiculous costumes. They looked now like a bodyguard, hastily gathered but determined, for the prisoner.

Now Thunstone took a quarter of a second for self-congratulation. He had felt the impulse to show himself and give battle, and had he done so it would have been poorly timed. As things were turning out, he had three points, well separated, to watch—the group around Collins, the larger group of Shonokin spectators, and the building, from which the horned heads were emerging.

Each of the horned heads was set upon shoulders, bony and high, like the shoulders of an Egyptian statue. Bodies came into view, a long leg apiece came over the top of the wall, and the beings slithered and swung to the ground outside. They were tall and dusky, at the same time faintly glossy, like reptiles. They moved erect toward the two groups. It seemed to Thunstone that they were slightly transparent, like painted figures on glass.

The Shonokin whose bugle-like call had summoned the pair of things gave another cry, wilder and shriller, and threw himself on his face. So did the other Shonokins who watched. But those by Collins—the

five in costume and the interpreter—drew themselves more tense. One of them made a noise like a menacing growl.

"Don't you think they'll protect you, Collins?" murmured the interpreter. "No, don't get up from that rock. You'll only attract attention to yourself the more quickly."

"You ought at least to tell me what it's all about," came the voice of Collins, and his teeth were set to keep the words steady. "You may not worry about rights and wrongs, but I do. I have all my rights and wrongs to mind. I've earned an explanation."

"You shall have it," the interpreter agreed smoothly. "Not that we recognize any claims of yours, Collins, but your knowing the truth is part of—of what happens here. In the simplest terms, let me say that we Shonokins and you men are enemies. You are usurpers, thieves, impostors on the throne of the world's rule. You've ruled badly, let it be said in passing. We are the rightful heirs, the true owners. We don't want you in our way. To be specific, we don't want you."

THUNSTONE listened, but his eyes were on the horned things that moved slowly out from the building. Their feet did not stir, they seemed to float . . . their feet? They had no feet. Thunstone remembered the tales of the Jumbee, of Sasabonsam and Tulia Viega and other devils of many lands. These beings stopped at the ankles. They floated nearer and nearer, just above the ground.

"Something—happened to one of us, down in the town," the interpreter was telling Collins. "One of your people struck one of ours. He fell. He did not move. We don't like that, Collins. We do things about it, or we aren't worthy in our lives. That is why we are exchanging you for our lost brother. Not a fair exchange, but it may satisfy Those."

Thunstone could sense the capital letter. As the interpreter said "Those," he gestured gracefully toward the approaching horned things.

It made sense to Thunstone. Shonokins feared their own dead, and for reasons he wished he understood fully. This ceremony

was a sacrifice of some sort. But the interpreter had also said that the costumed Shonokins would protect Collins, in their roles of human leaders. Mockery was there, but mockery of what?

"Here Those come," said the interpreter.

The horned beings had floated as near as the main group of Shonokins, every one of which lay flat and limp, as though unconscious. They were close enough for Thunstone to see in detail. One wore a loose robe or gown, the other was naked and scaly. They had enormous ears, their eyes were deepset and glowing under heavy ridges, they seemed to have bestial teeth. Through them Thunstone could see the ground and the horizon beyond.

They skimmed, at ankle height, over the prone worshippers, just clearing them. There was a flash of light in the sky, as though a bolt of lightning had fallen, but no thunder.

"Now!" cried the interpreter, stooping almost to Collins's ear. "Trust in your friends to save you from Those!"

For the beings were swooping toward the group around the prisoner.

The four costumed Shonokins, who had poised themselves tensely motionless for so long, now closed in around Collins. To the fore was the gray chief in his ridiculous top hat. He lifted the skull-nobbed staff. The others set themselves as for battle. Their hands lifted menacingly, crooked claw fashion. The interpreter walked swiftly backward, his eyes on the scene. He backed toward the spot where Thunstone hid. He made a chuckling sound in his throat, though it may not have been laughter.

"I wish you joy of what is going to happen to you," he called to Collins.

Thunstone moved quickly into the open and got his hands on the interpreter.

He acted more decisively and violently than in his struggle with the sentry on the slope trail. One hand closed on the slim neck, the other caught at a band that held the garments at the waist. With a quick and complete gathering of his strength, Thunstone swung the Shonokin from the ground, then muscled him at arm's length overhead, as an athlete at an exhibition lifts a bar bell. Up came one of Thunstone's knees, and down came the Shonokin, spine

downward, upon and across it. The spine broke like a dry stick. Still clutching and carrying the limp body, Thunstone ran forward.

The four Shonokins had faced the horned ones as they approached, and at the last moment they, too, had fallen face downward, cowering and scrabbling. That was the crown of the ceremony, the finale of the mockery. A human prisoner, around whom representatives of human strength had gathered, and then a falling away to denote the powerlessness of man's devices—somebody could and should write a definitive essay on Shonokin humor as manifested in Shonokin malice.

But before the horned pair could move in over the prone figures, Thunstone had tramped to the rock and braced himself before it. He held out his victim, second of the night, at the full length of his strong arms.

"I give you this," he said.

THEY screamed. Everything screamed the air full of noise. The shrill high chorused note drove into the ears like a needle, shook the flesh like a current of electricity. Any man but Thunstone, perhaps, would have dropped what he held. Undoubtedly that is what the scream was for. Since Thunstone did not drop the corpse of the Shonokin, he will never know exactly.

The noise died. The two horned ones were floating back, as curtains sag when the wind dies. Around Thunstone the Shonokins in their costumes were scrambling erect, and moving away. Their fear of a dead Shonokin was greater than their fear of Those they worshipped.

"You don't want it?" Thunstone inquired. "But you'll take it."

He raised the limp form shoulder high, and threw it sprawling through the air toward the horned ones. At the same time he ran toward them. One put out a talon-hand, and it touched Thunstone's sleeve. He felt his flesh burn as if from a blow with a red hot iron, and part of his coat blazed up and fell away. But the thing was only trying to ward him off, not grasp him. The two retreated. And the Shonokins, for saken and in terror, were running.

They yelled and jabbered as they ran, all in a scrambling turmoil for the trail and down the slope. Thunstone gazed after them, and tore away his burnt sleeve. The shirt beneath it bore a jagged black print, like a brand in the shape of a claw-fringed hand. He had time at last to speak to Collins.

"Are you all right?"

Collins did not answer. Thunstone took a step nearer, bent and tugged at the metal band. Its fastening gave way as he pulled, and Collins, free, stood up.

"Would you believe it, sir," he said, "I knew all the time you'd be here."

"You'll forgive me for finding that a little hard to believe," replied Thunstone, his eyes still fixed on the two horned shapes. They had drifted a little backward toward their castle-lair. Between them and himself lay the corpse of the Shonokin interpreter, its head lolling and its back interestingly broken. Apparently they were as furtive of it as were the Shonokins themselves.

"Without knowing you were there, and that you'd come at the right time," went on Collins, "how do you think I could stand to—"

"Thanks for trusting me," said Thunstone. He put away the thought that he himself had not known the right time to show himself, and that more through chance than otherwise he had seized upon the right time at last. "Stay close behind me when I—wait, listen!"

THERE were wails and jabberings down the trail. The fleeing Shonokins had come to the point where Thunstone had slain and left his first victim of the evening. The sight and sense of their dead companion drove the living Shonokins into an ecstasy of unreasoning terror. In terror, too, were the horned things they said their prayers to, in frank terror of a Shonokin corpse.

"I get the angle," said Crash Collins suddenly, as though he had been reading Thunstone's mind.

"Angle?" repeated Thunstone dully. Again he stooped, took hold of the dead interpreter, and lifted the limp body. Carrying it, he moved cautiously toward the

horned pair, saw them retreat before him. They wanted none of that corpse's nearness.

"It's like this," went on Collins rapidly. "Simple when you realize it. The Shonokins hate their own dead—well, so do we, though maybe we don't go quite as crazy from fear and disgust. But their—their gods, if they are gods. Those." Collins faced toward the two figures that dangled clear of the ground. They can't stand dead Shonokins, either. Don't you see why?"

"I see why," nodded Thunstone, and he did.

There must be only so many Shonokins alive. Men knew things about them—not many things, but some things. It was said that a Shonokin could die only by accident or violence. There were no females. No young. At least no human being had ever seen or heard of female Shonokins or young Shonokins. The Shonokins who wanted to possess the world again could not bring into that world any new Shonokins.

That must be why they dreaded death among them. When a Shonokin died, he was gone. Nothing was born to take his place. The cowering of Those made it possible, even plain. Because gods or devils or spirits can exist only if they are served and believed in. If Shonokins were to be killed, Those would be worshipped less. If all the Shonokins died, what would become of Those?

Thunstone approached again. The horned shapes were fleeing to their lair, climbing its wall like monkeys, dropping out of sight into its coldly flaming interior.

Thunstone walked almost up to the wall. There was silence beyond it.

"Throw the body in after them," suggested Collins, at his elbow.

It was hard to do, but they managed it. Thunstone seized an arm and a leg. Collins took similar holds on the other side. They swung the sagging form backward and forward, backward and forward, while Thunstone counted to get them into rhythm. "Three," he said, and they heaved it with all the strength in both their bodies.

The dead thing soared upward, seemed to catch at the very top of the wall, then slid inside.

A howl went up and, it seemed to Thun-

stone, a paler, stronger blaze of light. A moment later the door swung outward, and Thunstone had just time and wit to catch Collins by the shoulder and hustle him bodily back and up, upon higher ground to one side.

Liquid gushed out of the door. It was gleaming liquid, with something of the deadish light that shines in and upon the sea, in certain tropical latitudes where myriads of tiny phosphorescent animals fill the waves with the seeming of cold fire. It made a torrent on the slope, and downward. Again Thunstone heard the Shonokins yell from below. They had something practical to fear now, for that flood was following the trail they had taken, like the bed of a stream. They yelled, and then their yells blurred and bubbled, as if overteemed with the flow.

"What kind of stuff is that?" demanded Collins. He sniffed in the night. "I don't exactly smell it, but my nose feels it, somehow."

"Let's get away from here."

The two of them retreated along the slope. They came to a high rock. Climbing to its top, they were able to see. A moon was coming up at last, and the valley where the Shonokin town had been built also sent up light, the light of the strange liquid, like a reflection of the moonglow.

"What's become of Those?" asked Collins.

"Perhaps nothing," replied Thunstone. "We won't know for a while. We won't ever know, unless we come back, very carefully and very intelligently, to find out. What I think is that they have been partially defeated and badly frightened. They wanted certain things tonight—yourself, for one. They didn't get you. Instead, they got the cold meat of one of their followers. It caused an explosion and overflowing of—"

"Probably," put in Collins, "they've had that stuff pent up here for a threat to the town below."

"Probably," agreed Thunstone. "It got out of hand, and it must have killed more Shonokins. Fewer worshippers by far than this time last night. It can't be pleasing to Those."

"Licked on their home grounds, huh?" said Collins, and his voice was savagely triumphant. "Let's strike out across the heights here. We don't know the country, but by morning we ought to reach some sort of a settlement—" He broke off and permitted himself a shudder, such a shudder as he had scorned to allow himself when Shonokins were all around him, exultant and sure of his doom. "A human settlement," he amplified.

"All right, let's start," Thunstone told him. "There's moon enough for us to see the country and remember it. For we'll want to know a way back, when we return to Araby."

THEY came back a week later, Thunstone and Crash Collins and three other men, carefully selected by Thunstone. The day they chose was a fortunate day, they had been assured. They came prepared in a variety of ways, for any sort of trouble they could imagine waiting.

There was no trouble. There was nothing. The town of Araby had been on that slope, and was there no more, nor even a trace to show where it had been. Not a house, nor a hole to show the basement-position of a house, nor one of the pavements that had been strange underfoot in the night, nor even the station house by the railroad track.

"Licked on their home grounds," Thunstone remembered that Collins had so described what had happened to the Shonokins.

Naturally the spot would be distasteful, unendurable. They were gone.

He tried to find the place where the castle had crowned the slope. He could not even be sure of where it had stood. Had he been sure he might have found there, at least, a trace of the Shonokins and of Those they prayed to.

"I know I wasn't dreaming," said Crash Collins at length. "But maybe these gentlemen think both of us were dreaming."

The three others shook their heads, and the oldest said courteously that he knew Thunstone would never have brought them so far just for the sake of an idle dream.

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Shoo, Shoo, Shonokins!

HERE is what Manly Wade Wellman has to say about the Shonokins in general and the infamous Shonokins of "Shonokin Town" in particular. These not quite human beings pose a problem even to the resourceful Thunstone and we suspect that he was not too reluctant to have the reinforcing influence of Crash Collins—as explained below—in this latest adventure.

That I couldn't have made up the Shonokins wholemeal from my imagination is proven, I think, from the letters I get now and again telling me things about them—readers of Thunstone's adventures say enthusiastically that they've heard about Shonokins for years and are glad to see that something is being done about them.

It is idle to locate the town of Araby more definitely than in the accompanying account, for Araby does not exist any longer, and has left practically no trace of its being. Yet there is a John Thunstone, as scores of people will tell you, and there most definitely is a Kent (Crash) Collins. If anybody doubts the existence of Crash, he may be found at the naval air station at Norfolk, Virginia, complete even to the tattooed "Crash" on his arm. In my files are letters from him, including his written permission to tell this story about him. Who knows? He may bob up again.

He and Thunstone both are puzzled about the seeming non-existence of female Shonokins. Yet it may be suggested that the mere absence of record of this much-needed gender in that race does not make them

necessarily non-existent. Perhaps the male Shonokins keep their mates undercover. Has anybody a clue or a theory? Thunstone would like to hear of it.

Manly Wade Wellman

NEW MEMBERS

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 Edward Taborsky, 529 East S2nd St., New York 28, N. Y.
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We're sorry that lack of space prevents the inclusion of the names of all New Members. The rest will appear next time.

READERS' VOTE

SHONOKIN TOWN
 CATPAWS
 THE NIGHT
 THE WINGS
 THE MAN WHO TOLD
 THE TRUTH

I'LL BE GLAD WHEN
 I'M DEAD
 THE CINNABAR
 REDHEAD
 THE SHINGLER
 FOR LOVE OF A
 PHANTOM

GHOST

Here's a list of ten stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales—then clip it out and send it to us.

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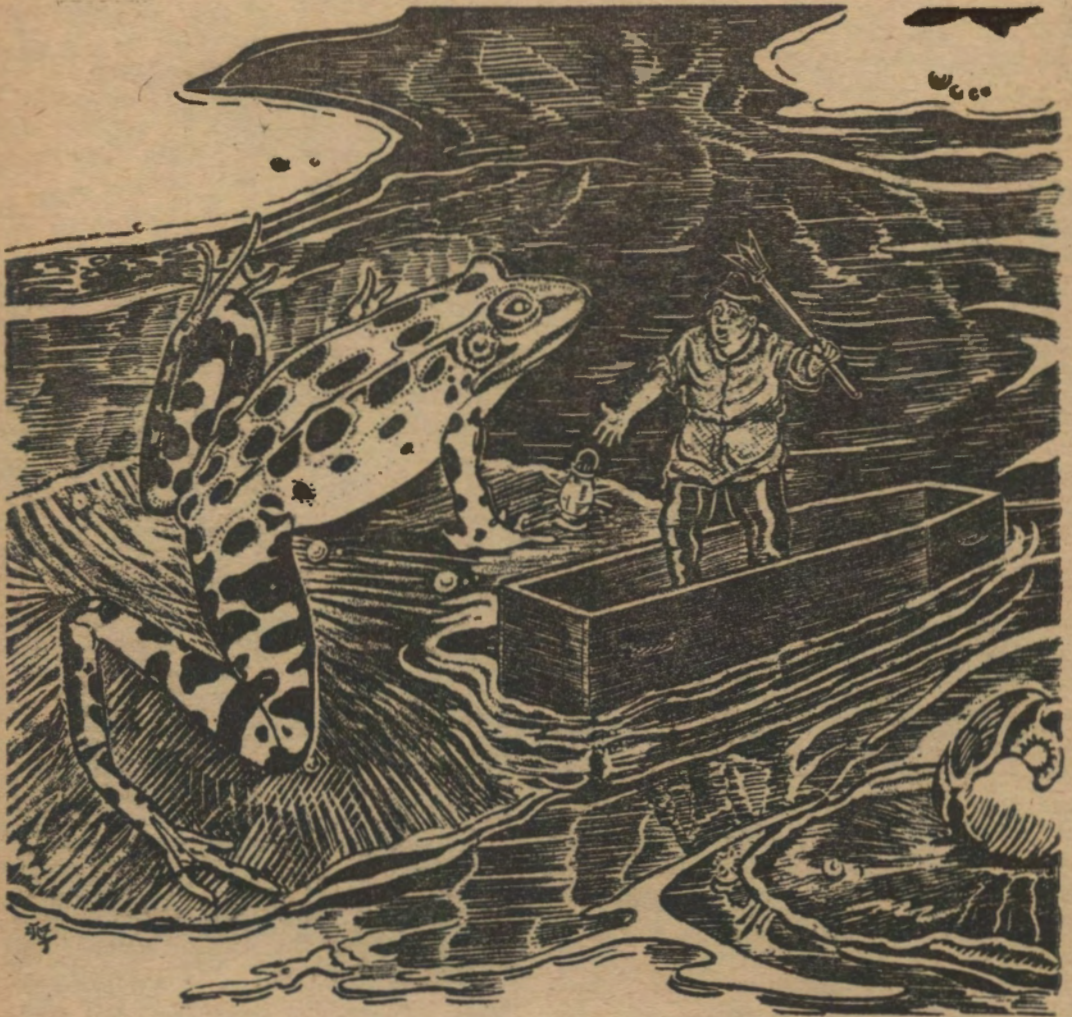
Weird Tales

15¢



"SPAWN OF THE GREEN ABYSS" by C. HALL THOMPSON

Frogfather



BY MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Strange beings dwell in that part of the swamp that is deepest and darkest

NO, I never liked frogs' legs very much, not even before what happened. And I wouldn't eat them now if I was starving. This is why.

Though I'd known and worked for Ran-

son Cuff for two years, all of each day and part of most nights, I remember him clearly only in the dark of that particular night we went frog-hunting. Ranson Cuff was the sort of man who shoved himself into your

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

mind, like a snake crawling into a gopher hole. I defy anyone to find anyone else who liked Ranson Cuff—maybe his wife liked him, but she didn't live with him for more than three weeks. Nobody around the Swamps liked him, though he was the best off in money. He ran a string of hunting camps for strangers from up North, who came to hunt deer or fish for bass, once in a while to chase bear with dogs. He did his end of that job well, and if he was rude the strangers figured him for a picturesque character. I've heard them call him that. The Swamps people called him other things, to his face if he didn't have mortgages on their houseboats, cabins and trapping outfits.

This night we were paddling, he and I and an old, old Indian whose name I never knew, in a really beautiful boat he'd taken for a bad debt. Cuff was going to get a mess of frogs' legs, which he loved, and which he'd love three times as much because he'd killed the frogs for them. Cuff would have killed people if he'd dared, just for fun. I know he would. I'd gone to work for him when I was fifteen—my old maid aunt, who raised me, owed him money she could never pay. When he told her to, she gave me to him, and I suppose what I earned went into settling the debt. Slavery—and he was the quickest and oftenest to remind me of it.

That night was clear and dark, not a speck of moon and all the stars anyone ever saw at once. They sheened the swamp-water, up to where the great fat clumps of trees cuddled it in at the edges. I paddled, the old Indian paddled, and Cuff sat like a fat toad—not a frog—in the bow with his lantern and his gig. The lantern-light gave his face the kind of shadows that showed us what he was. His face was as round as a lemon, and as yellow and as sour. His mouth was small, and his eyes couldn't have been closer together without mixing into each other, and his little nose was the only bony thing about him.

"Head for that neck of water northeast," he said. "I haven't ever been in there, but I hear frogs singing. And none of them are out along these banks."

HE CURSED the frogs for not being there to kill. I began to scoop with my paddle to turn the boat the way he said, but the

old Indian pulled his paddle out with a little dripping slop.

"We don't go there," said the old Indian. He spoke wonderful English, better than Cuff or myself.

"Don't go where?" snarled Cuff. He always snarled, at people who had to take it. The old Indian had come to work for him, hungry and ragged, and wasn't exactly fat or well-dressed now.

"I'm speaking for your good, Mr. Cuff," said the old Indian. "That's no place to stick frogs."

"I can hear them singing!" Cuff said. "Listen, there must be a whole nation of them."

"They're there because they're safe," said the old Indian.

"Khaal!" Cuff spit into the water. "Safe! That's what they think. We're going in there to stick a double mess."

"I'm of the first people here, and I can tell you the truth of it, Mr. Cuff," went on the old Indian, with Indian quiet and Indian stubbornness. "I'm surprised you don't know about that neck of water and what's beyond. It's the home of Khongabassi."

"Don't know him," growled Cuff.

"Khongabassi," repeated the old Indian. "The Frogfather. He's lived there since the world was made. The oldest ones say he dug the waterways and planted the trees along them. And the frogs are his children."

"Oh, heaven deliver me!" Cuff screwed his fat face into the sourest frown I had ever seen, even on him. "Indian talk I came out to hear. You make me sick. Get going northwest."

"No," and the old Indian laid his paddle inside the boat.

"You're fired, you old—" and Cuff cursed the Indian every way he knew. He knew a great many ways, including the Indian's ancestry back to Adam and his children down to the last generation. "You're fired," he said again. "Get out of this boat."

"Yes, Mr. Cuff," said the old Indian gently. "Put in to the shore—"

"Get out right here," blustered Cuff, "I'm not taking you to the shore."

"Yes," said the old Indian again, and slipped overboard sideways, like a muskrat. He barely rippled the water as he swam

away. Cuff spit after him, and cocked his head.

"Hark at those frogs singing!" he said. "Frogfather—I'll frogfather them! Right in their pappy's dooryard. Johnny," he said to me, "get us going there."

I did all the paddling, and we came to the neck of water. Trees were close on both sides, shutting out the little, little gleam of starlight, but there seemed to be a sort of green brightness beyond. Cuff swore at me to make me ship my paddle.

"Look at the glow from under the surface," said Cuff. He reached right down into his half-knowledge for a cozy explanation. "Must be full of those little shiny bugs like the ones in the sea. Makes it easy for us to find the frogs."

I remembered how my grandfather had once said you're better off knowing a few things than to know so many things that aren't so. My hunch was that maybe there was rotten wood somewhere around, what old-timers call foxfire. Cuff, at the bow, knelt with his lantern in one hand and his gig in the other. The gig had a hand-forged fork for its head, three sharp barbed spikes. The shaft was a piece of hickory, about four feet long and as thick as your hand could hold comfortably.

"Snake us along the bank, Johnny," he said. "Now hold her. I see one."

I SAW it too, in the light of his lantern, a nice fat green frog on a rock set in some roots. It squatted with its knees high

and its hands together in front of it, like a boy waiting his turn at a marble game. Its head was lifted, its eyes fixed by the dazzling glare of the lantern, and those eyes were like precious jewels. Cuff stabbed down, and brought it up, squirming and kicking, its mouth gaped open, all three times of his gig in it. He smacked it on the inside of the boat to quiet it, and shoved it off at my feet.

"Got your knife?" he growled. "Then slice off its legs—no, snake me along again, I see a bigger one yonder."

"You're tipping me away," he said. "Balance me back, or I'll put a knot on your head with this gig-handle."

"It's not me, Mr. Cuff," I argued, but not with any heart it in, because he always frightened me. "You must be tipping us—"

"My weight's here next the frog, you fool," he said. "And you're tipping us toward the water. You'll have us over in a minute!"

The boat was tipping, and I shifted to bring her back on an even keel, but she tipped more, and I looked around to see what snag might have hooked us.

Over the thwart lay something like a long, smooth piece of wood, darkish and dampish in the dim light. Yes, a snag, I thought. But Cuff turned and lifted the lantern, and I saw it was no snag.

It was a long green arm!

From elbow to fingertip it was visible above the thwart, weighting down that side of the boat and tipping us in the direction of the open water. The ordinary human arm is eighteen inches long, I hear, the length of the old-fashioned Bible cubit. This was longer than that. Two feet at least, and probably more. It was muscled smoothly and trimly from the neat point of the elbow to the slender, supple wrist, and beyond this stretched slim, pointed fingers, but not enough. The hand spread, and it had three fingers and a thumb, with no gap where the other finger had been lost. Between them was a shiny wet web, and it was dead gray, where the arm was covered with sleek green skin blotched twice or three times with brown-black spots as big as saucers.

What Cuff said I wouldn't want written down as my own last words. He said it loudly, and at the noise another arm came

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up across the other, and hooked there. Then a head came into view and looked at us.

THE lantern-light caught the eyes first, great popped-out eyes of every jewel-flashing color known to the vainest woman that lives. They looked at Cuff. They were set in a heavy blunt head the size of a fish-basket, and in some ways the head was like Cuff's. But it had no bony nose, no nose at all, and the mouth was a long curved slit like a tight-closed Gladstone bag. Under the mouth, where the chin ought to be, the white throat dipped in and out, in and out, breathing calmly.

The creature lifted a hand, quicker than Cuff could stab. It took hold of the gig just below the head. That hickory was as strong as a hoe-handle, but the big green webbed hand snapped off the iron fork just like picking a daisy, and tossed it away with a splash. At that splash every frog stopped singing. And the big elbows heaved a little, shoulders came into view, and I saw what there was to see of the creature, down to where its waist came out of the water.

All blotchy green and brown, with a white belly and a wet smoothness, it was a frog. But it was bigger than a man by twice, I suppose. Our boat went over, and I flew through the air and splashed in. That moment in the air was enough to see Cuff caught by neck and shoulder in those two green hands. And he went down under water, lantern and all. He hadn't time for another curse.

As I sank, I got my arms and legs working. I was more anxious to swim away than swim up. My eyes were open, and I saw under the water by the green light that was there. That part of the Swamps must have been the deepest, and many times my length below I could make out old drowned tree-trunks, a lost forest from some ancient time of storm and washaway. They were mixed up together as if something had tried to make a hut or nest of them, and I suppose something had. There was a hole among them like a door, with the green light coming from it, and down toward that hole swam a long green shape, nine feet at least from its blunt head to the heels of its flipping webbed feet. Under one arm it carried



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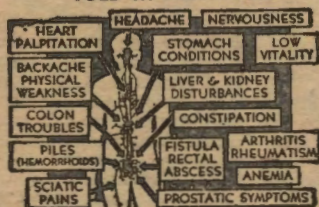
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Cuff, tucked like a stolen baby, and the other hand helped swim it along.

Then I broke surface and churned away, sick and faint and ready to burst with my pounding heart, but making for the little channel by which we had come into the place.

I MADE it, and when I swam out, I heard a long, soft whistle. It made me almost jump out of the water. Another whistle, and something dark and swift and silent came toward me. I tried to turn away, but my strength was gone. The dark shape bore close, and it was a canoe. The old Indian put down his hand and helped me get in. Then I lay there and came to life, while he paddled the canoe idly around and around, here and there, on the peaceful starlit water.

He did not seem surprised or even curious. He asked me nothing. When I was able, I told him what had happened.

"It was Khongabassi," he said quietly when I had finished. "Khongabassi, the Frogfather. When a stranger comes to kill children in their very home, will not their father help them?"

That was something new to think about. I got strength to sit up.

"We'll have to get help," I said, "and go back and—"

"And challenge Khongabassi?" he finished for me. "Why? He saved his children. He took only Mr. Cuff and let you go. Khongabassi never takes any more prey than he needs. But if many men go there, with grappling hooks and weapons—then Khongabassi will have a way to deal with them, and I do not want to see it."

I didn't want to see it, either. I asked a question. "You knew all about Khongabassi, didn't you? You knew what he would do?"

I saw the old Indian's head nod against the stars. "Of course. He has done that to others who came to his home without permission. We first people learned many lives ago to keep to our ways and leave him to his. Khongabassi is not terrible, he is only Khongabassi. You think of him as what we call a *djibaw*, an evil spirit. We think of him as a part of nature, that defends nature's weak things. Men should be a part

of nature, too, and perhaps they would escape what Mr. Cuff has not escaped."

"What shall we do, though?" I persisted.

"Oh," said the old Indian, "we shall think of a story, you and I, that explains Mr. Cuff's death. A story that white men will believe."

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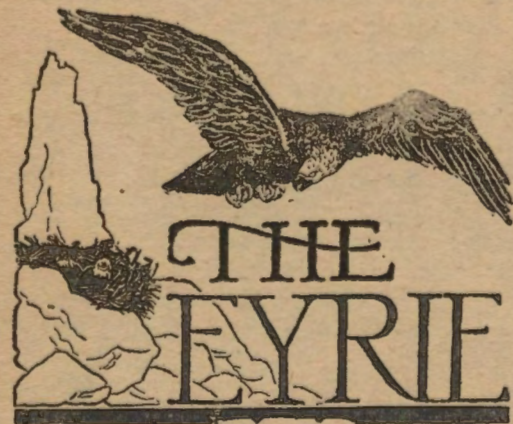
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Here Come the Shonokins

WHEN first I wrote of John Thunstone and the Shonokins (Manly Wade Wellman confides) I referred to the rumor of a legend; well, it seems to be more than a rumor, and more than a legend.

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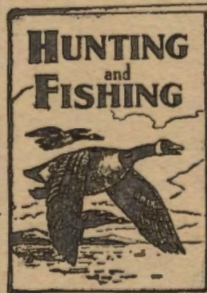
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I have said before that John Thunstone exists—perhaps not by that name—and that, though I've romanticized him and his adventures, there exists a sound basis of factual report. But the whisper of a humanoid race of baleful magicians, who claim to have ruled America before the earliest Indian, whose external difference from man is only in the peculiar eye and the extra-long third finger, seemed fantastic enough—until the outlying readers were heard from.

On the showing of a large and lively correspondence, there are Shonokins. There must be Shonokins. Maybe more of them than I thought, or Thunstone thought. And maybe I've given them too much publicity!

Scholarly is the report of Stuart Morton Boland, San Francisco librarian and adventurer in many lands. His studies reveal that many Indian tribes, North and South America, knew and feared the Shonokins—"being like men who walk the earth as men but leave wherever they walk a place accursed."

Murray G. Thompson, of Bath, Maine, further contributes a report of his examination of pre-colonial carvings on a ledge near his home—carvings that must be likenesses of the Shonokins and may be the work of Shonokin artists.

J. Edmond Marsengill, of Lineville, Iowa, has seen tracks in the Ozark Mountains of feet that might be human feet—except that the toe next to the little toe, analogous to the third finger of the hand, is *excessively long*, and of the makers of such tracks the Ozarkians do not care even to talk for fear of retribution."

Those Ozarkians are, perhaps, to be imitated. I don't want to encourage Russell Finger, Jr., of Camden, N. J., and others who ask how they can meet Shonokins face to face. Few, outside of Thunstone himself and his aide Kent (Crash) Collins, of Tampa, Florida, have done that and come back with a tale to tell. But let me answer some of the most frequent questions:

Shonokin is pronounced with the accent on the first syllable, to rhyme with the Scots pronunciation of "manakin." Only one settlement of Shonokins has ever been noted, the town of Araby near Zoar Valley in upstate New York; and it exists no longer.

There seem to be no female Shonokins, and very few males. If you see one at all, you're looking at a very rare creature. Mr. Marsengill, quoted above, suggests that they reproduce by budding, like certain sea creatures. A more interesting theory, into which I won't go here, is offered by Alan Dittes.

As for Thunstone himself, I have forwarded several letters to him from readers of WEIRD TALES, but I must sadly say that he never answers letters, except to his immediate and trusted friends. The nature of his work is such as to demand the utmost care in correspondence and indeed in all other behavior. But here is a last quotation, from a recent letter to him, signed Mary McFall, of Westcliffe, Colo.:

"Can you or Mr. Wellman show me a Shonokin? I think they are relatives of mine."

"Mr. Thunstone desires me to say to you, Miss McFall, that if you're even distantly related to the Shonokins he's afraid to hear so much as your name again. Thunstone fears few things, and Shonokins are among them!



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The Leonardo Rondache

BY MANLY WADE WELLMAN

BETWEEN Prendic Norbier and John Thunstone were not many physical differences. They were both inches over six feet, they were both broad even in proportion to such height, they were both dark-haired and strong-featured. Each had huge, long hands such as one associates with statues, each was perforce dressed in specially tailored clothing and specially cobbled shoes. And just now, in Norbier's

little study-shack behind his country house, they sat on opposite sides of the table beneath the bright ceiling light in attitudes of eager interest almost exactly alike.

Differences were the great differences one sees at a second glance. That second glance, if a thoughtful one, would define John Thunstone's weight as hard, active weight and Norbier's as relaxed, good-humored weight. The tan on Thunstone's broad

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

.... a deep, dead silence and strange light that grew less and less ...

brow and lined jowl was somehow the tan of open-air activity, and that on Norbier's recognizable as fashionable tan, the product of lounging on beaches or dozing under sun lamps. And the expression in Thunstone's eyes was of intent, almost apprehensive study, while Norbier looked on in confident anticipation.

Dwarfed in Thunstone's great fingers was a magnifying glass. He narrowed his eye to peer through it at the photograph on the table. Finally he laid the glass down and looked at Norbier.

"It's a da Vinci signature," he announced gravely. "The reversed writing and the distinctive letter-forms—of course, those in themselves could be trickery, even clumsy trickery. But the glass shows that the lines are real writing, not a forger's painstakingly drawn replica. It's da Vinci, though with more of youth in it than any I remember seeing. Of course, there are other experts, better qualified than I—"

"You're one of several that says Leonardo da Vinci wrote the signature I photographed," said Norbier. "Thank you, Thunstone." He took the photographed writing back. "Now as to your pay—"

"For my pay," said Thunstone, "show me the original."

Norbier smiled. His smile was not like Thunstone's, it was a trifle crooked and suspicious. "Well," he said, "I've thought and even worried about showing the original. But you, Thunstone, study other things than handwriting and Renaissance art. Your specific studies might make it all right for you to have a look. Those studies of yours—and the honest wish I feel to make a friend of you."

"My only other serious study," reminded Thunstone, "is black magic and how to nullify it."

"Exactly," nodded Norbier. "You'll see how it fits in. Step this way."

They rose and Norbier led the way across the floor to a wide narrow table that stood against a wall. Something stood there, like a big round mirror, covered with a white cloth. "Here it is," announced Norbier, and pulled the cloth away.

What Thunstone said would have been a curse, but for the tone that made it a prayer. He gazed at the round disk of

wood, old and heavy and as big around as a tea tray. For a moment it was no disk, nor was it wood. In the brilliant light of the ceiling lamp he had a sense of attentive menace, glaring and scrambling. Then he made himself realize that he was looking at something painted, and painted long ago at that—the colors dimmed, the detail faded. Thunstone's mouth looked thin for a moment, but he kept himself steady.

"There's the signature I photographed, dashed in with black pigment just below the picture," Norbier was telling him. "And you probably realize just what one of Leonardo's lost masterpieces this is."

THUNSTONE gazed at Norbier. "I know what story of his life it immediately tells," he agreed. "A story some say is a legend, and others—Mrs. Rachel Annand Taylor for one—feel sure it is true. Leonardo was a boy in the home of his father, the notary Piero da Vinci. A peasant brought a round of wood—a *rondache*, such as foot-soldiers of that day used for shields—asking that a decoration be painted upon it—"

"Exactly, exactly," Norbier almost crowed. "And Leonardo was always interested in monsters. He shut himself away and studied all kinds of unpleasant little things—lizards, spiders, bats—and borrowed from all, blending and flavoring them with his own genius. What he managed," and Norbier seemed not too anxious to look at the picture, "was sufficient to startle his father; then the elder da Vinci's business sense asserted itself. He gave the peasant another *rondache*, nicely painted with an arrow-pierced heart. He sold the weird masterpiece of his son, at a thumping price; enough, perhaps, to pay Leonardo's first tuition fees in the studio of Verrochio in Florence."

"And this may be the *rondache* in question," Thunstone studied it again. "You understand Piero da Vinci's first reaction to it, don't you? May I ask where it came to modern attention, and how you got it?"

"In Germany," said Norbier. "I had a little hand, as no doubt you've heard, in studying and identifying the hodge-podge of art treasures stolen by the Nazi bigwigs and stored away in vaults. This turned up in a neat little trove locked up in a cellar

owned by one Herr Gaierstein. Know him?"

"Gaierstein," echoed Thunstone. "Not much publicized, but admired by his chiefs for certain ancient pagan knowledge. Quarrelled with Himmler because he, Gaierstein, suggested that Himmler's elite henchmen needed special initiation before they assisted at the old rites with which Nazi chiefs wanted to replace German churches. Nobody knows how Gaierstein died, except that he did die, completely and messily. I know about him. That's where my black art studies come in."

"This *rondache* was in a vault within the vault," explained Norbier. "The other art objects fell into two classes—expensive popularized items, and pretty average obscenities. This was something special. There was no way to find where it came from. Finally I secured its release to me."

He turned back to the painted round and touched its edge with his finger. "I've been at pains to clean it without damaging. Only today there came to light this writing around the edge—a triple spiral of letters. What do you make of it, Thunstone?"

Thunstone bent, peered. His lips moved slowly, then seemed to freeze stiffly. He caught up the cloth and veiled the *rondache* once more.

"Norbier," he said, as earnestly as a judge on the bench, "if I've done you any service, do me one. Leave this thing alone for the time being. Don't uncover it or look at it until I return."

"Return?" repeated Norbier. "When?"

"Soon. Within an hour, perhaps. Agreed, Norbier?"

"Agreed," smiled Norbier, and Thunstone hurried out, with less courtesy than common with him.

LEFT alone in the study-shack, Norbier thought briefly that the silence was deeper and deader than it had been before Thunstone's call, and that the light on the ceiling was at once more lurid and less brilliant. He shook his big body, and smiled consciously to rid himself of such manifest illusions. He'd let himself become unsettled, ever so slightly, by Thunstone's strange manner in studying that triple-spiral of letters around the edge of the *rondache*.

He told himself to leave creep-sensations to Thunstone. Who was Thunstone, anyway? A man of undenied gifts and scholarship, who nevertheless fiddled and fumbled with superstitions ordinarily taken seriously by nobody over the Hallowe'en age. There were those rumors about Thunstone's enmity with some self-styled wizard named Rowley Thorne, and Thorne's destruction; and those others, even less clear, about some people called Shonokins—was that the right word?—who weren't people, but something like people. Norbier could not even remember where he had heard the stories, or whether they had been told for the truth.

Anyway, he had better things to think about. This *rondache* was the work of Leonardo da Vinci, without whom the Renaissance would certainly not have been the Renaissance. More than that, it was perhaps the first artistic labor of Leonardo da Vinci ever to attract more than family notice, and it was the basis of a delightful story of a great man. Leonardo, blessed demigod of the Quattrocento—here was his first token of greatness. Even if Norbier had been aware that he had made a solemn promise to Thunstone, he now forgot it. One hand twitched the covering cloth from the *rondache*.

No getting away from it, even after so many glimpses he found the impact of that painting almost physically strong and daunting. But Norbier, for all his appearance of lazy softness, was neither naive nor cowardly. He sat down before the painted thing to study it.

If Leonardo da Vinci, a curly-blond boy in his teens, had studied lizards, bats and spiders for this, he had not hodge-podged his studies. Anyone else would have been content with a lizard's body, a spider's knuckly jointed legs, a bat's wings. Not so Leonardo, master of his eye and hand and brush even before his voice had changed and the first peachy fuzz had sprouted for the beginning of that apostolic beard he was to wear. What had Thunstone said? "... blending and flavoring them with his own genius." That was right. It sounded almost like a phrase from an art critic's description, what time Norbier would call in the art critics. But first he would enjoy the thing to the full, then decide which museum

—civic or university—to offer it to as a loan. Not a gift, a loan. Then the critics would come and stare and wonder and worship.

Gazing and pondering thus, Norbier told himself that he was seeing the odious figure in the center of the round wood more clearly than ever before. It had clarity and life, that ancient color on that ancient wood. The thing was head on toward an observer, but you sensed the shape and extent of the foreshortened body, at once lizard-lithe and spider-squat. The legs—there seemed to be a great many of them—were hairy and jointed, but those in front, at least, bore handlike extremities, reminiscent of the forefeet of lizards. Those wings were true da Vinci work; Norbier remembered the tales of how da Vinci, seeking to invent the airplane centuries before Langley or Wright, studied painstakingly every flying creature, bat, bird and insect. As for the thing's head, that was apparently meant to seem a squat, dark-furred blotch, with two glowing close-set eyes peering from the thick fur as from an ambush. A real face to it, flattened like a bat's, and a mouth with a jaw of ophidian shallowness, but a little open, to show . . . yes, fangs. No wonder that everyone who saw the thing, from Piero da Vinci to the present, squared his shoulders a trifle to dissemble a shiver.

THE writing around the rim, now. Oddly enough, Thunstone had been more impressed with that than with the picture. Men had told Norbier that Thunstone was never frightened, but Norbier thought different. What said the writing? It was a string of Roman capitals, that began at almost the exact top of the *rondache* and curved away to the left around the wooden rim, then came back and made a second circuit within the first, and a third within the second—a triple spiral. Aloud Norbier spelled out some letters:

"A—G—L—A—"

A cross-mark came there. "The end of the word," he said, and enjoyed the comfort of his own voice's sound. "If I read backward from left to right, there are words. What language? Let's see."

He took hold of the *rondache* and revolved it, reading more words aloud as they came to the top:

"Agla . . . Barachiel . . . On . . . Astasieel . . . Alphahero . . . Raphael . . . Algar . . . Uriel . . . end of the first circle."

Some of the names sounded familiar, names from old songs or prayers. He revolved the disk to read the second circle:

"Michael . . . Iova . . . Gabriel . . . Adonai . . . Haka . . . Ionna . . . Tetragramaton."

That last name he had heard before, and neither in song or prayer. Some devil-story—wasn't Tetragramaton a fiend or goblin? Once more he revolved the disk, reading the final circle of names:

"Vusio . . . Ualactra . . . Inifra . . . Mena . . . Iana . . . Ibam . . . Femifra."

Norbier wished Thunstone had remained. But Thunstone said he would return. The names might mean something to Thunstone. Meanwhile, that monster-painting continued to impress. Any fool, even someone with no art appreciation, must admire the master touch of the boy who had been Leonardo, son of Piero da Vinci. The flat representation actually looked three-dimensional, as though it were a bas relief.

"Hmmm!" grunted Norbier aloud. For it was a bas relief. He hadn't noticed that before.

The painted figure, too adroit to be grotesque, actually bulged from the flat surface of the wood. Norbier put out a hand to explore its contours—and snatched the hand back. Something had moved behind him, in the direction of the dying fire on the hearth, with a solid *plunk*.

He hopped out of his chair, as swiftly as John Thunstone might, and spun around to face whatever it was. For the instant he fully expected to see something, big and living, crawling out of the fireplace toward him; something that had come down the chimney, a sort of baleful antithesis of Santa Claus, with gifts of violence or ill fortune.

There was nothing there. No movement. Norbier became aware that he was fluttering and writhing the hand with which he had touched the *rondache*, and rubbing its fingertips together. Those fingertips still harbored a sensation of unpleasantness. For when he had touched the likeness of the monster, it had seemed to stir and yield, as painted wood could and would never do.

That was what had startled him, more than the noise from the direction of the fireplace. But what had made that noise?

He walked warily across the floor, and then he saw. A book had fallen from his shelf beside it, and lay open on the reading table below the shelf. He bent to see. The Bible, of all books—it had popped open to Isaiah, the eighth chapter. His eyes caught the verse at the top of the inner column, the nineteenth verse:

And when they say unto you, Seek them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep and mutter. . .

It was coincidence, of course, this passage, but Norbier cursed his imagination that made him think he heard actual muttering behind him. His eye skipped to the last verse of the chapter:

And they shall look unto the earth; and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness.

"Dimness of anguish," repeated Norbier aloud, for he relished the neat turn of a phrase. "Driven to darkness. Sounds as if it should fit in somewhere with what's going on—

"What IS going on?"

Again he whirled around, facing toward where the *rondache* was propped up on the table opposite.

Something huge, heavy, many-legged, was lowering itself with ponderous stealth from the tabletop to the floor.

NORBIER stood dead still, his brain desperately seeking to explain what he saw. Explanation came.

Hypnotism. That was it. Self-hypnotism. He had gazed too intently at the painted nightmare. Or, more likely, it was that triple spiral of letters. He'd read, a year ago, something in a national magazine about hypnotism and how it was induced. You can hypnotize yourself by gazing raptly at a helix—a spiral line, curving in and in and in within its own whorls to a central point. You look at it, and it eventually seems to begin turning like a pinwheel, and you go to sleep. You may have dreams in that sleep. That was what he, Norbier was doing now—sleeping, dreaming.

The entity had completed its slow, pon-

derous journey from table to floor. It seemed to crouch there, then to hoist itself erect on the tips of its multiple claws. Among the curved, jointed brackets of its legs hung a puffy body, like a great crammed satchel. The integument had pattern, like scales, and from the spaces between the scales sprouted tufts and fringes of dark fur, like plush grown wild. And it had wings, also scaly and tufted, ribbed like a bat's, that winnowed and stirred above its bulk. The head, a shaggy ball, craned in his direction. Deep within the thicket of fur upon the face clung two wise, close-set eyes, that glowed greenly, then redly, at him. Between and above them the fur seemed to part in two directions, as if the undeveloped forehead frowned. A mouth opened, the light caught a stockade of white, irregular, pointed fangs. A great gout of foam came out, and fell splashing on the floor

THE talons scraped on the floorboards, like the tines of a dragged pitchfork. The creature moved toward Norbier. The two foremost limbs rose, and at the ends Norbier saw hand-like claws, like the front feet of a big, big lizard.

He shook his head, like a mauled boxer trying to clear his wits. He kept remembering that article about hypnotism. It was never of long duration. Even if someone hypnotizes you, and falls dead next minute, you have a short nap and waken again, as well and serene as ever. But while you napped, what dreams may beset you. Norbier tried to retreat before the advance of the creature, and his back came up against the bricks at the side of the fireplace. He reached down and caught hold of a pair of fire tongs.

"Get back from me!" he bawled shakily, and lifted the tongs as if to strike.

The wings flapped and stirred the air. The big body—it looked as big as a bear—rose slowly from the floor. Another flap of the wings, and it sailed at him. He swung the tongs, missed. A wing brushed him with its furry tip, the shape circled round in the glaring light, and dropped down facing him near the opposite wall. Norbier felt sick. The touch of the furry wing had seemed to nauseate him, to weaken his joints.

The creature was lifting itself on its wings again. This time—

"Stay against the wall, Norbier!" came the stern, quiet voice of John Thunstone.

Norbier could not have moved from his position against the wall had he tried. He sagged there, grateful for the solid brickwork, and his eyes seemed to cloud over so that only as a huge, vague shadow did Thunstone move forward and in front of him. Toward Thunstone came another shadow, also big and vague, but seeming to flap wings and flutter many legs.

"Would you, though?" Norbier heard Thunstone say, and there was a quick move as one shape moved to meet the other. Norbier's inner ears were wrung and jangled by a cry, so high as almost to top the audible range for human hearing and go among the soundless vibrations—a cry sharpened by pain and rage and terror, such a cry as might be uttered by a bat larger and more evil than all bats ever seen or imagined.

Norbier dashed at his eyes with the back of his hand, and he saw the struggle. Thunstone was poking or thrusting with something—with Thunstone's back toward Norbier, the weapon could not be seen. The creature retreated before him, trying to strike or grapple with some of its limbs.

"Get back," Thunstone was saying. "Back where you started. There!"

THE thing had scrambled up on the table. It was shrinking unbelievably—no longer bear-size, more the size of a cat. It retreated toward the standing *rondache*. It was gone. The *rondache* showed the picture Norbier knew. Thunstone quickly laid down something slim and shining, and seized the *rondache* with both hands. He spun it around and around, from left to right. He faced toward Norbier.

"All safe now," he said, quite cheerfully.

Norbier gazed at a splattery blackness on the floor—an uneven wet blot, another and another beyond, clear back to the table. It would look like the trail of blood from a wound, but it was so black. His nostrils caught, or he thought they caught, a sickening odor. He swayed, pawing at the wall for support.

"Sit in that chair next to you," said

Thunstone, and Norbier managed to reach it. Thunstone laid the *rondache* down and made a long stride, swift as a tiger, to a cupboard. The door was locked, but Thunstone plucked it open with a rending rasp of broken metal. He explained in satisfaction, drew out a bottle and poured from it into a glass. "Drink," he said, steadying the glass in Norbier's hands.

It was good brandy. Norbier reflected that he always bought the best brandy. He looked up, revived. His eyes sought the shining, slender object on the table beside the *rondache*.

"That?" said Thunstone, following the direction of the glance. "It's a stabbing blade, made of silver—black magic never faces silver, you know. Silver bullets kill witches and werewolves, silver charms keep away devils. Someone has claimed that Saint Dunstan himself forged that blade. It isn't the first time I've used it successfully, nor the second or the third."

"I'm—sorry, Thunstone," Norbier managed. "I got looking at that spiral of writing—"

"Of course. And you turned it around three times from right to left—widdershins, contrary to the clock and to the sun. That let the demon come out to you. And any one of fifty legends will convince you that no demon wants to be called up by someone who is at a loss for ways to treat it. I put it back where it came from, by turning the *rondache* the opposite way."

"But that isn't a work of Leonardo!" Norbier protested, feeling like a child whose dearest illusion has been shattered. "Not Leonardo! He might have to do with gods, but not with devils."

"Think of the story of the *rondache*," reminded Thunstone gently. "Leonardo's father was frightened by the picture, but he was money-conscious enough to offer it for sale. Who would buy such a thing from him, and for what purpose?"

NORBIER made no answer, and Thunstone went on. "A sorcerer, naturally. Italy was full of them then, and they are not gone from the world. The addition of the spiral writing, and the method of turning it, was a spell to invoke the monster."

"Destroy it," begged Norbier. "What-

ever I spent for it will be money well spent if the thing is put out of existence."

Thunstone smiled. He had picked up his silver blade and was wiping it.

"I rather hoped you would say something like that, Norbier." He bent and caught up a rod that lay on the floor. Norbier saw that it was a walking stick, but hollow. Thunstone fitted the silver blade into it, and so out of sight. Leaning it in a corner, he went back and took up the *rondache*. This he carried to the fireplace, stirred the last coals with a careful toe, and put the round wooden disk upon them.

There was a leap of flame, pale and hot as the center of a blast furnace. Around that leaped up a circle of glowing redness, and sparks rose as from a fireworks display. They died down again, fat, black clouds of vapor billowed and vanished in their turn. When Norbier looked closely, the wood was burned to ashes. Norbier rose and walked to where the open Bible lay.

It was as if some power tried to warn

me," he said. "Look at what this page says—no, the pages have turned."

"There was considerable stirring of air in here," observed Thunstone. He came to Norbier's side. "Now the book is open to the beginning of the Gospel of Saint John. If your other reference warned you, this should comfort you."

He put his finger on the page. "'In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God,'" he read. "The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.'"

Thunstone smiled at Norbier. "That's enough, eh?"

"No, it's not all," demurred Norbier, studying the page. "Look below, where the sixth verse begins. 'There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. . . .'"

John Thunstone put out his hand and closed the book. "All my life I've tried to deserve my name," he said softly. "Some day, perhaps, I shall deserve it a little."

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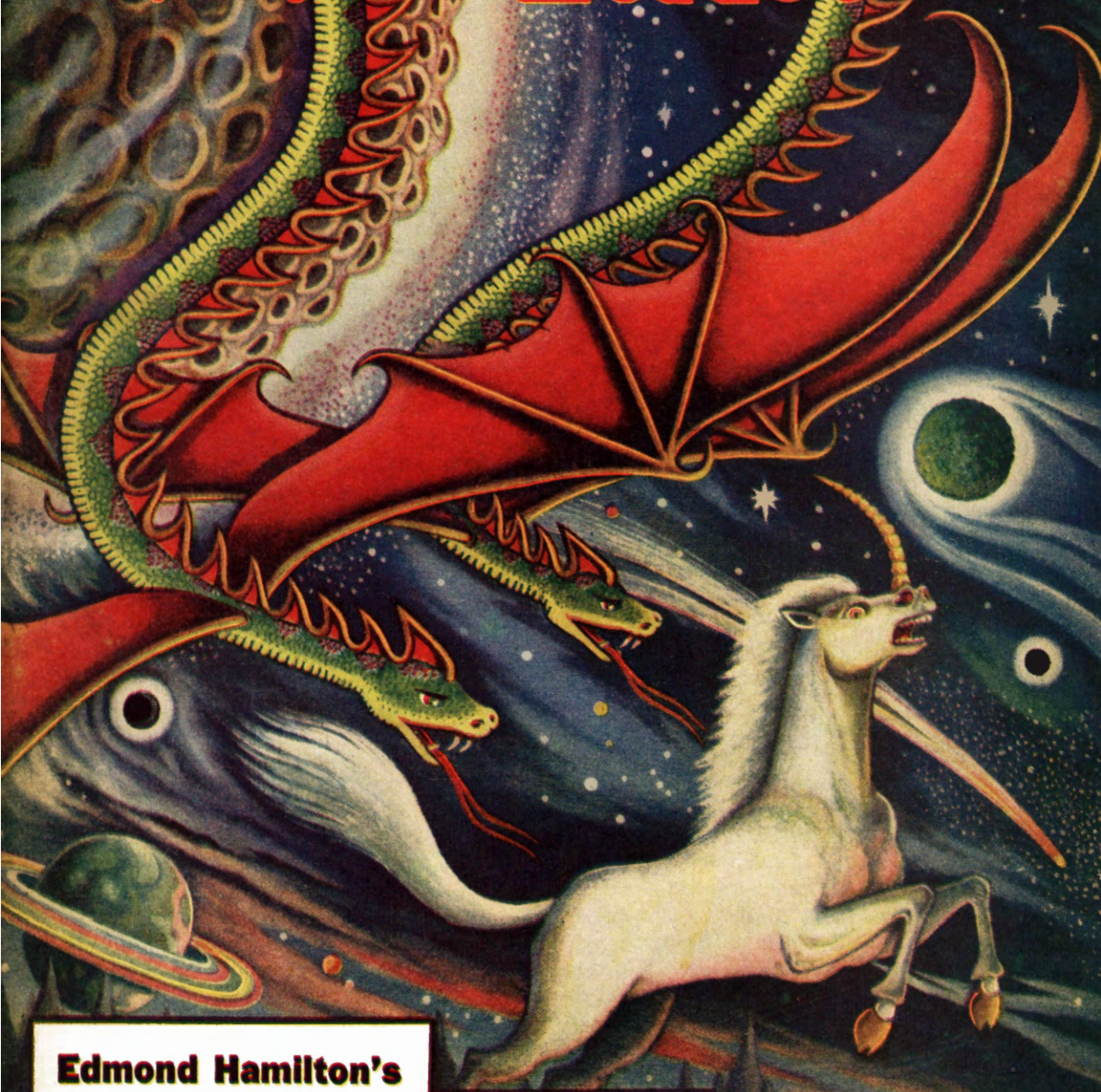
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BY
MANLY WADE WELLMAN

*"Part man, part bear—all legend," is
what they said*

REUBEN PIPE FEATHER was an assured young man with a brown vain face. Eighty years earlier, he would have been one of the most accomplished warriors and hunters of his tribe, and one of the most boastful. He wore movie-rodeo cowboy clothes. The orange shirt had tan collar, cuffs and pocket flaps. His dark gray pants hugged his slim saddle-bowed legs, and were tucked into high-heeled boots of glove leather. Around his neck was a cherry-red scarf, on his wrist a silver bracelet, on his forefinger a turquoise ring. He carried his wide hat in one hand so as to let the hot afternoon sun strike lights from the oiled glory of his long, straight black hair. He had the noble face of a Hiawatha and the manners of a small-time actor.

"Now we're off the Katonka reservation," he assured James Randolph as the white tourist stopped his car where a vile dirt road dwindled to a grass-grown trail. "And we're away from those ignorant blanket bucks and squaws that gloom at you and sell you fake jewelry and pottery made in Germantown. You're lucky I was home on vacation from Hollywood. Those old fools wouldn't tell you anything if they knew it, and they don't know it in the first place."

The old fools were in reality dignified middle-aged Indians, shabby in blankets and moccasins, but respectable, reserved and mannerly. Among them were Reuben Pipe Feather's own father and grandfather, and these he probably scorned above the rest. Reuben Pipe Feather had gone for two years to a little Kansas college, and thence to the film capitol to do extra and bit work in several western and historical pictures. Now he was back on the Katonka reservation with the air of a tribal hero looking for recognition and deference. At the trading post he had readily begun chatter with James Randolph, who was interested in Katonka folklore.

"You said," reminded Randolph, getting out of the car, "that here was where the old-timers say that Dhoh—the bear-witch demon—used to be reported." Randolph was



Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

plump, forty-two, mustached and spectacled. He edited a small daily paper in the east, and American myths were his hobby. His two-weeks' holiday among Indian reservations would garner, he hoped, tags of stories for what might some day be a book.

"Yeah," agreed Reuben Pipe Feather, fanning his brown face with the hat. "This is free range, government-owned. The folks might graze their ponies here—but they don't." He laughed, teeth white as sugar lumps. "They're afraid of Old Dhoh. He might eat the ponies, they think. And them."

The country might be haunted, Randolph reflected as he gazed. The reservation land was mostly gently rolling prairie, with tufts of willow or cottonwood scrub, but here the rolls became hills. From lesser rises near at hand lifted more distant heights, crowned with brush and trees and cobbled with boulders.

Wild-looking, yes; and, to a superstitious imagination, baleful. "Dhoh lives here," said Randolph. "This bear-witch. What's he supposed to be?"

"He'd scare even American kids," said Reuben Pipe Feather, grinning more widely. "They say he's part man and part bear—one side like each, I guess. A couple of old granddads say they saw old Dhoh's tracks. One foot like a man, one like a bear. You know." Fluidly, Reuben Pipe Feather's free hand sketched in the air. "What do you reckon? Too much firewater, or a trick shoe to make scary marks?"

Randolph had a camera slung on a strap over his tweed-clad shoulder. He focussed it, snapped the shutter at the hills. "Nice bit of landscape," he said. "What's that sparkle in front of us—beyond the high grass next to the cottonwoods?"

"That's one of the things I mean," Reuben Pipe Feather shaded his eyes to peer. "Dhoh's bathtub. When I was a kid, one of the squaws showed me a couple of others. Dhoh's supposed to wash himself there now and then. I was scared—but plenty."

THEY walked toward the brown sparkle. It was a sort of muddy tank-like pool, like a big bathtub at that in size and shape. Nestling among grass-grown rocks, its brown surface stirred as though with a

gentle simmer of heat. "There's a spring in there," said Randolph.

"Sure, sure. The old folks say the spring oils up your joints or cures your bellyache. But nobody uses it, not if Dhoh's reported around." Reuben Pipe Feather laughed again. "I wonder how that yarn started, and how fast and far it's grown." producing tobacco-sack and papers, he vindicated his Hollywood cowboy training by rolling a cigarette with one hand.

Randolph squatted and dipped fingers in the pool. It felt faintly warm, perhaps from the sun. Then he studied the scum on his fingers. It was oily, sticky. Still squatting, he peered at the overflow in the waterside grass, then rose and studied a stretch of earth beyond, damp and bare. "You say nobody comes here."

"Nobody." Reuben Pipe Feather's brown lips pursed and blew a smoke ring in the still bright air.

"But I see tracks." Randolph pointed. "Fresh, they look to be."

He walked around the edge of the pool. The damp earth held two tracks at the very brink and two more beyond, pointing away.

Behind him Randolph heard the sudden, sharp intake of his companion's breath. He glanced back. Reuben Pipe Feather's face was brown and jaunty no longer, but gray and sick. Reuben Pipe Feather's lips sagged, the cigarette fell from him. His eyes were wide.

"Will you look at that?" he whispered hoarsely, and Randolph looked. A moccasin track, but the other—

Broad, strong, flat, it looked like the impress of a great long axehead. The toes—yes, the toes had, each at its end, a slash-lean mark. Even James Randolph, who was no woodsman, knew what a bear track must look like.

"Mr. Randolph." Reuben Pipe Feather was badly frightened. "Let's get out of here."

"Why?"

"You know what those tracks are, Mr. Randolph." The young Indian was walking away.

"You said you didn't believe—"

"I do now. And I'm not going to stay. Come on." Randolph did not move, and Reuben Pipe Feather was heading for the

trail. "Then I'll foot it back to the post." And he moved faster than one would think possible in those cowboy boots.

Randolph smiled under his mustache. Undoubtedly the youngster had brought him out here to play a joke. Must have made the tracks himself and pretended. . . . But nobody, Indian or white, could have made his face grow gray like that.

Another study of the tracks. Randolph wished he knew more about animals and their feet. This might be a mockery of a bear track, achieved by a distorted, claw-fringed moccasin. Again, it might not. He focussed his camera again and snapped it.

The metallic click was answered by a deep grunt from one side, and Randolph fairly whipped up his head and stared.

No wonder he thought he had been left alone at the pool. Even with a grunt to give him direction, he looked twice before he saw the grunt-maker, squatting crumpled beside and half behind a clump of big dried weeds.

It was a lean figure, swathed in an ancient blanket of a brown that was bleached and weathered to a dead-leaf paleness. Abundant and untidy gray hair bushed over a swarthy face, from which bright eyes watched Randolph. A second grunt acknowledged Randolph's gaze.

"*Abi*," Randolph managed an Indian greeting.

"Good afternoon," replied a deep, gentle voice. "It is hot."

"You speak American," said Randolph gratefully.

"I have learned many tongues," was the rejoinder. "Among them, the American." The crumpled figure stirred and rose. The blanket fell from chin to earth, covering an ancient leanness like a toga. "Is that what they call a camera?"

"Yes," said Randolph. "I took a picture of these tracks."

The old man came forward slowly, stiffly but not shakily. Randolph saw beneath the abundant gray hair a face that matched the toga-blanket, a face dark and Roman, with a firm mouth, great hooked nose, deep steady black eyes, a crisscross and labyrinth of aged lines and wrinkles. "Yuh," said the gentle voice, deeper still. "Dhoh's tracks. What will you do with the picture?"

"Publish it. Show it to other people. Find out what it is."

"Dhoh's tracks," repeated the ancient. From inside the blanket crept the left hand, to gesture. It was a lean and withered hand, brown and dry-seeming as a sheaf of twigs, but it had flexibility, even grace. "I heard the young fool talking. *Abi*! He lost his doubts in the time it takes to draw one quick breath."

"You believe in Dhoh?" prompted Randolph hopefully.

A BRIEF nod of affirmation. "Yuh. Because I know. I am older than any, perhaps, of those others." The thin hand wafted a little gesture toward the reservation. Glancing that way, Randolph saw that Reuben Pipe Feather had gone out of sight around a bend of the road. "They have funny beliefs. Most of them they made up. But I know about Dhoh. American, where are you going?"

"Back to my car." Randolph pointed with his thumb. "Will you ride with me?"

"You do not want to trail Dhoh by his tracks?"

Randolph shook his head. "The damp earth ends here in the coarse grass. I'm no trailer."

"Not you. But I, I am a good trailer." The draped old leanness moved away through the rustling grass, and stooped. Another grunt. "Here are more marks. Will you come?"

Randolph felt excited, mystified. "Wait. Dhoh—isn't that a name of an evil spirit? Something half man and half bear?"

"So it has been believed." The brown face peered back. "But I am not afraid, American. Are you?"

Randolph scoffed away the notion. "Of course not, old man."

"Then come on. We will follow Dhoh's trail."

Side by side they did so. At least Randolph kept pace and tried, without success, to see what the bright old eyes kept finding among the grass. Once or twice Randolph spied a broken stem, a crushed leaf—that was all. He remembered that the old wild Indians could follow a trail across a naked rock. But maybe this old chap was joking, pretending, like Reuben Pipe Feather.

"See," said the ancient, and again his left hand moved free of the blanket-folds. "Dhoh was here."

A bald splotch of ground among the grass-tufts, full of fine dust—and in it a single track, broad and flat and fringed with claw-slashes. Randolph paused, scolding himself for feeling cold. "How did he make that mark?"

"With his naked foot."

"He doesn't wear a trick shoe?"

"American," said the old man in dignified protest, "even that young idiot tells a true track from a false one."

"Maybe it's a real bear track," offered Randolph. "Not a witch's track."

"There have been no real bears here since the Americans took the country from the Indians. I would be more surprised to see signs of a real bear than to see signs of Dhoh."

He moved ahead, with his stiff but nimble gait, "*Abi*," he said. "Another mark. See, the claw-touch on those broad leaves. Dhoh headed into this little ravine. It will lead to where he lives among the hills."

So confidently and promptly did the old Indian take his way in the direction of the ravine that Randolph was ashamed to linger. One backward glance showed his car parked on reservation ground, far away and alone. "Come," his companion urged him.

Randolph decided to come. "Tell me about Dhoh," he asked.

"Dhoh is Dhoh. There is nothing like him."

"Apparently not," agreed Randolph, but his mind was on other bear-demons in tales he had heard. The Lapps had a bear spirit, alternately to be feared and prayed to. The Ainus, those inexplicable white savages with beards on Japan's northernmost islands, believed that they descended from a bear hero. And only Mudjekeewis, the Chippewa wind-god, dared challenge Miche Mokwa, a monster bear—that was in Hiawatha. What did the Piegiens say, the tribe called Blackfeet? Bear is near kin to man. Do not eat it, or kill it without a muttered apology for killing a brother.

"But you said you knew about Dhoh," persisted Randolph. He hoped that the old Indian would not fall silent. If they did that, there was no talking with them.

The firm mouth was touched with a close smile, like the smile of a patient grandfather. "I will tell you, American. It all happened an old man's lifetime ago. In those days the Indians worshipped their own way, before the Americans forbade them."

"The Americans don't forbid now," Randolph made haste to remind. They had entered the gully between two bluffs and he had a little difficulty with his footing, for the low point had been washed by recent flows of rainwater until the stones were loose underfoot. He slipped and stumbled, but the old Indian stalked surely along. On either side of them rose boulders and thickets of brush above, shading away the sky and the sunlight. It reminded Randolph of the strange rough country into which Rip Van Winkle strolled to meet the dwarfs with their cask of enchanted liquor. "The Indians are allowed their old beliefs," elaborated Randolph. "The Indian Bureau has seen to that for more than a dozen years. Ever since Secretary Ickes and Collier—"

"*Abi*, that is true, now. But in the meantime," and the old man spat, "the tribes have forgotten most of their old worship-ways. They forgot the fasting that young men must undergo to find their friends among the animal spirits. I want to tell you about a young man, a boy, whose fast was one of the last held by his tribe."

"Do tell me," begged Randolph.

"The boy was growing into a man. His uncles and grandfathers prepared him by singing and telling him things at night. On the chosen morning he left his father's lodge and came somewhere out here." Once again the thin old hand made a flourish of indication. "He made a shelter of brush and spread his blanket and lay there. He had water in a clay pot, but no food. He must not eat or sleep or move until he heard the voice he had come to hear."

RANDOLPH remembered hearing or reading something of that old custom. A youngster waited until hunger and lonely quiet half hypnotized him into what he fancied as a vision, generally of some animal spirit. That became his secret medicine, his focus of personal worship.

"The boy stayed a long time," the quiet

voice continued. "Most fasts in those old years lasted three days or four at most. But the boy watched the sun rise and set six times. Seven times. Eight. He was afraid that he was not wanted by any spirit, but then he remembered that if such a wait happened, the waiter was destined for something big in medicine. At the ninth rise of the sun it was that the spirit of the bear—Naku-ma, came and spoke to him. The bear stood thus."

The old man stopped and drew himself up, straight and dignified. For all his leanness he suddenly put on an aspect that was ursine. He gazed solemnly at Randolph.

"The bear," continued the old Indian, "spoke to Dhoh, the boy. It called him brother and son. Naku-ma, the spirit of the bear, saw that Dhoh was weak and faint, and brought him food for them to eat together. Naku-ma said that he had waited long to try Dhoh, to find him worthy of receiving the power of the spirits, that could do almost anything and everything. Naku-ma gave the powers to the boy."

"What powers?" Randolph was a little tired. He sat down on a projecting gnarled root against one bluff that hemmed in the gully. The car, the trail, the muddy pool were out of sight and worlds away.

"Naku-ma showed him how to cure a wound by breathing on it," said the old man, standing straight and motionless. "Naku-ma showed him how to heal the sick by chewing medicine plants and breathing on the sick ones. Naku-ma showed him how to mix war paint that would turn the blows of an enemy, and gave him a power in his right hand that would strike a blow of death every time. Naku-ma whispered in his ear, and Dhoh could understand all languages. Naku-ma hugged him in his arms, and Dhoh had strength greater than the strongest warrior." Again the firm mouth smiled, close-lipped. "Why do you ask me to tell you these old things? You are an American. You laugh at me inside yourself. You do not believe."

RANDOLPH remembered his high-school reading, the essays of Benjamin Franklin. Franklin's *Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America*, teeming full of wisdom and understanding. . . . "Savages

we call them, because their manners differ from ours, which we think the perfection of civility; we think the same of theirs." And that anecdote about the colonial missionary who called the beliefs of an Indian host "fable, fiction and falsehood." To that accusation that dignified savage had returned: "My brother, it seems that your friends have not done you justice in your education; they have not well instructed you in the rules of common civility. You say that we, who understand and practice those rules, believed all your stories; why do you refuse to believe ours?" . . . Wonderful Poor Richard, well might Hume call him the first philosopher of the New World. He, Randolph, would profit by this very lesson.

"But I do believe, old man," he protested, and as he spoke he almost felt that he did believe.

"Maybe you say that because you think you must," demurred the Indian, still straight, dignified and motionless in his close-drawn blanket.

"Why must I believe if I do not want to?" demanded Randolph plausibly. "I believe, I tell you. Your words are honest. Do me the favor to think that my words are honest, too."

"Then," and a courteous duck of the head, "I can tell the rest. It is not much. Dhoh came home with those powers of which I speak, and used them to help his friends. But he had changed in some ways that frightened the Indians. He seemed to have a bear's weight and strength sometimes. When angry he would growl as a bear growls, and his teeth grew big and sharp, something like a bear's teeth. Because his people were afraid of these things, they avoided him." The gentle old voice sounded sad. "They did not trust him, even when he showed himself a great healer and a great chief in war. When the Americans came, and he called on them to fight for their lands and freedom and children, they turned from him. The Americans, they said, were men, and he, Dhoh, was not a man."

Silence. "And then?" Randolph made bold to prompt him.

"Dhoh was angry. He growled and roared like a bear. He cursed them in the name of Naku-ma. He spit on the ground and went away from them. It was then that he

changed even more than at first. One of his feet became a bear's hind paw, one of his hands became a bear's front paw. No more did he ever help men. All his powers he turned against them. It was bad, to live alone and hate his kind. But his kind had turned against him."

"Yes, that was bad," agreed Randolph diplomatically.

"The other Indians called him dangerous. Once or twice they tried to kill him, but he killed them. Killed them like beetles. *Ahi!*" The smile faded, then came back. "Well, that is all the story of Dhoh." The thin old hand made a motion as if casting away a pinch of sand. "I have finished."

"But after that?"

"After that, Dhoh has kept his own place, and men have learned to leave him alone. You are sure you believe all this?"

"I believe it," Randolph told him dutifully.

The gray-thatched head turned, peering. "I see more tracks—fresh tracks—and beyond. Look!"

He led Randolph to a great dead stub of a tree, a dozen feet high, that was still rooted strongly to the rocky floor of the gully.

"Dhoh's marks."

The rough bark was rent and torn by great talons, high and low. Randolph remembered his Ernest Thompson Seton—bears marked threes like that.

"See," said the old man, "he rubbed himself here. There are hairs."

"Let me take a picture of it," said Randolph, and did so.

"Take a picture of that, too."

The skinny hand pointed, and Randolph saw, under a rocky projection a dozen yards ahead, the black mouth of a cave or hole.

FROM that manifest den of something large and wild Randolph involuntarily started back, but his companion stumped toward it. Randolph made himself approach. "What is inside?" he whispered.

The gray head shook. "Nothing. Dhoh is not inside."

"Be careful!" warned Randolph. "You can't be sure."

"But I know," the gentle voice told him.

"Wait. Stay back. Look at the tracks." Randolph pointed to a string of them, here plainly visible in earth dampened by recent showers. Alternately the moccasin track and the taloned breadth of the bear-mark led straight to the cave and in.

"Let's go back," said Randolph, his voice a shaky hoarseness.

"Did you forget my story, American? . . . No, I left something out. When Dhoh left his people, the spirit of Naku-ma changed him more. It turned his feet so that they pointed backward on his ankles. Those tracks," and the old man pointed, "lead out, not in the cave."

"Now wait!" protested Randolph. "I've heard that story in other places, too—about a demon monster's feet being turned around. But it's a stupid impossibility. How could they be turned backward?"

"Like this."

The brown hand took hold of the blanket and lifted it a few inches. And Randolph could see the old Indian's feet.

Lean, pole-like shins came straight down to the ground, as if driving into it. Two flat projections extended backward. The blanket hiked higher. Randolph saw a moccasin, and something else. Broad, heavy, shaggy with grizzled hair, a foot like a bear's, but pointing backward.

"I am truly sorry," said the gentle voice. "But back there near the reservation line you used that camera. You took pictures of the tracks. You would have talked about it in other places. More Americans might come, many more. And the Americans have powers of their own, that might even defeat and destroy the powers given by the spirit bear Naku-ma."

Randolph tried to back away, but he felt his knees quivering, and he feared that he would stumble and fall.

"And you," he stammered. "You—are—"

"Yes, that is right." The old man dropped the blanket. He was naked, lean, brown. Up one flank, over his shoulder and arm and talon-armed paw, ran a thick tangle of course fur. He opened his mouth, and Randolph saw the light gleam on great pointed fangs.

"I am Dhoh," said Dhoh, and leaped upon him.

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JANUARY

Weird Tales

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Strike two,
strike doom!

"The Ormolu Clock"—AUGUST DERLETH

In That Same Moment

BY MANLY WADE WELLMAN

I WALKED out of my lonely little cottage into my lonely little yard, and lounged against the sycamore, watching the birds. I thought about the fellow who called himself Last Man, and his claim to have mastered time. "Once done," he'd told me, "and it's permanent. Conquered time is your doormat, your toy, your pocket piece. I made it run backward for me; I can make it run forward for me, or stand still for me, or anything." Remembering as I lounged, I decided to take him seriously enough to disbelieve him.

In that same moment the birds that had fluttered and dodged before and above me stopped fluttering and dodging, and hung there like stuffed dummies on invisible wires.

If that sounds unthinkable, that's how it should sound; for unthinkable it was, to see them stop short in the air, wings frozen in mid-beat and become birds in those super-show-window exhibits at museums—the ones where a whole landscape, complete with plants and creatures, is somehow sealed and caught, true to life except for the utter immobility. I jumped and started forward, and muttered something out loud. It sounded sharp, almost deafening, for it was the only sound in a world gone suddenly dead still. Still in sound as in motion.

A bird stuck in the air, at about the height my lifted hand would reach. Indeed, I half raised a hand toward it, but felt I'd better not. Beyond was the magnolia tree, and every broad, shiny leaf of it as rigid and motionless as though stamped out of green metal. I looked back at the house. Smoke was coming from the chimney—no. The smoke hung like a great blob of dirty fluff. If you've seen stereoptican views, you've seen such things. Three-dimensional, utterly



Heading by Lee Brown Coye

natural in every way but one. Things were frozen.

"What's coming off?" I asked somebody, though nobody was there. I wished, wildly

The Last Man had lived in the far future, in a world too terrible to hold humanity.

wished, for company. This nightmare was not one of the endurably vague ones. Everything was clearly, sharply cut to the sense, and absolutely silent and unmoving. Company—if there'd been another human being—

Ruthie had said she was coming. She had smiled last night, and said she'd see me today. On her doorstep I had tried to make a dignified impression by remarking that her interest in Ted Follett must be an absorbing one, and that my future absence from her side wouldn't be noticed. I'd meant to sound aloof, but Ruthie had smiled more sweetly than I had thought possible even for her, and had said, "Well then, I'll come and see you tomorrow before noon." There were a million promises in what she had said. Or a million mockeries. Suppose she'd been here right now—would she be frozen, locked, stricken into statue-stillness? Wouldn't she? Would she? Ruthie would be different, somehow, from the rest of the frozen landscape—or was I the only mind that thought her different? My mind, and Ted's?

I walked around the house toward the sand road that led down to the highway and its four or five little business buildings grouped there, two filling stations and a store and a country cafe. I moved in complete silence, except for the slap of my shoes on the sand. Up ahead I saw a shiny sedan, blue and chromium. Ted Follett's. Between the car and me a figure moved, in that silent color-photograph of trees and landscape.

The movement, against all the quiet, was uncanny enough to bring me to a halt. I glanced away from the figure's approach. Right at the roadside, within arm's reach, hung a tiny ball-shaped openwork design of motes—insects. Gnats or midges, caught as if in colorless amber, the way insects have been preserved through immemorial ages. Below, at a tree root, a rabbit reared itself as though to hop over a fallen pine cone. Its open eye was as hard and bright as black glass.

"Ahoy," came a voice, high and mocking, a voice I knew. The figure was striding close, and I recognized its slenderness that cheap mail-order clothing couldn't disguise,

the childish smoothness of the face, the mocking twist of the grin. It was Last Man.

HE CALLED himself Last Man, he once told me, because that's what he was, the last of all men. And he'd lived in the far future, in an age, when all else of men and women had died in a world too terrible to hold them; but before he could die, he'd mastered time and come back, back, back, through eons and ages, to our year and century, and he chose to live in our community because it was peaceful and cheap. He told me more, but that was its gist, and no additions or ornamentations could make it seem more improbable. Yet he half convinced me when he talked, and to me alone did he tell the story, one day when I'd fallen into conversation with him at the cafe on the highway.

"You have a dreamy imagination," he said. "You're the only one in this region who can comprehend, or half comprehend, my story. I don't ask you to believe me, though. Indeed, I'd prefer you didn't, it's more amusing that way." And he talked on about time traveling, and said what he had to say about mastering time. "It's a skill that becomes no skill at all, like swimming or rope dancing or adding up big columns of figures. Once done, and it's a permanent ability . . ."

I remembered these things as Last Man strolled up to me and smiled with his thin rosy lips in that face that was smooth and delicate like a child's, but old and mocking like a devil's, and held out his slim hand with its soft, pink palm. "Well," said Last Man, "you see now that I can do it."

"Do what?" I asked stupidly.

"This." He gestured. "I've stopped time. Locked it. I made it run backward for millenia once, and for a few weeks let it go forward. Now, for a change, I've—made it stop. For everybody and everything, except our two selves."

I felt weary and cripple-brained. "Why me along with you?"

"Because you can be made to understand. You've listened and sometimes commented, when I told how I came to this time. And it might not be awfully good, all alone. I needed another living creature with me."

"Why not a dog?" I asked him, just to say something.

"Why not, indeed? But you'll be as useful as a dog, and less trouble. Come on back along the road to the highway."

I started back with him. I gazed at the car ahead of us, and he read my mind—he often read minds. "There's something that will interest you," he said.

He was right. As we came near, I saw for certain that it was Ted Follett's car, and that Ted Follett sat at the wheel like a wax-work of his pudgy, trim-tailored self, and that Ruthie sat beside him, sweet and lovely and summery-dressed, but as motionless and rigid to the look as a carved jewel. Even her honey hair looked as permanently set as the finest of dusty gold wire. I turned away from her with a sense of faintness and dread.

"If you'd touched her, that might have spoiled things," said Last Man at my elbow. "Come away, leave them locked in the moment." I was glad to follow him away past the car. "Locked in the moment," he said, as if savoring an epigram. "But you and I pass through a moment of time."

His manner was lofty, mocking and earnest all three, like that of an adult talking down to a child—or teasingly misinforming a child. And, myself childlike, I was vexed and argumentative.

"Of course we're passing through a moment of time," I said. "We're always passing through moment after moment—"

"When you misunderstand I despair of you, and yet you have more sympathy and mental pliability than anyone else I've met in this age. No. You and I alone pass through the moment. Nobody else has ever done that. It has always been the moment that passes the material creation. One stands and waits, while moments flash upon him and break over him like wave after wave."

"Why did you tell me to come away from Ruthie in the car?" I asked.

"So brief is a moment," Last Man continued, "that men think of it as small, infinitesimal, a point. But it's unthinkably, illimitably vast, a universe—only our view is small. In a single moment, while you might sit down to dinner or take a book from a shelf, I might be buying beer in

the café, miles away in the next town, a garage is changing a tire. Across the ocean in Europe, a young lover greets his mistress. On the world's far side, a little child sleeps away the night. In the tropics, a tiger crouches to surprise an antelope. In the arctic, a bear scoops a fish out of a hole in the ice. These are but a handful of events on a tiny planet. On the sun, spots spread and shrink, larger than our oceans. On a far world, waters run, plants sprout. Comets dash through space. Stars are born or die. All in a single moment."

"Why," I said again, "did you tell me to come away from Ruthie in the car?"

STROLLING along, he smiled sidewise at me, crafty as Satan. "But no human being—save myself—comprehends the moment's complexity and size. Your brain grasps but one idea or sensation at a time, and not even that for long. Not until this present moment—arrested and locked—has it been possible to develop every potentiality in the moment, and the relationships of potentialities to each other. It is like the universe in the atom, the living organism in the cell—"

"Why did you tell me to come away from Ruthie in the car?"

Stopping, he let his eyes glare at me. I realized, perhaps for the first time, how brilliant and large they were, how dark and living and bitterly wise. "Oh!" he snorted, in one of his rare losses of temper. "You're failing me. She's the only idea you'll entertain in this moment. If I make it last forever for you, she'll occupy your mind forever, the tiny trace she makes in the moment will be everything."

Then he smiled again. "Set yourself at rest. I'll tell you later how to waken her into the eternal moment, along with you. Meanwhile, attention to what's all around us."

He led me on, toward the highway. We passed between houses with grimly motionless jewel-flowers in the yards, smoke like puffs of cloudy gray cotton over them. We passed a statue-like dog, its nose bent toward a stump. A bird or two held its place in the air. "Don't touch anything," Last Man bade me again.

An idea came to me, despite his sneer that I thought only of Ruthie. "I touch things every mo—I mean, I touch things constantly. The molecules of atmosphere," I elaborated. "If they're locked, why don't they oppose my passage?"

"Your fluid field, that allows you to move in the moment, affects them by your contact. They adapt themselves to you. Look," and he pointed toward the window of a house as we passed. "Inside the glass you see a bowl of fruit. It looks as massive as fruit of glass or stone. But if you touch it, it will become fruit again, pulpy and edible. Fruit like that in passing moments."

"And if I touch Ruthie—"

"At last you begin to use your mind," and he grinned at me. "I feel the glimmer of renewed hope in you. You comprehend how this moment, locked as it is, can be your moment. You can rule it and the universe it contains." He smiled the more broadly.

We had reached the highway. I looked along it. A truck stood near us. Beyond, a bus. Beyond that, two private cars, close together. And beyond, out of sight—what towns, what regions of locked quiet? I remembered a boyhood fancy I used to trade with playmates: *What if everybody in the world went to sleep except us, and we could break into the candy store. . . .*

Last Man read my mind again. This time he actually chuckled. "Your candy

store is ready at hand, but select carefully. Think among your acquaintances as to who to touch and bring into the moment first. No, not Ruthie. Let her wait. She will be best awakened after you have roused a little band of dependents, among whom you will be ruler. Think well, I say. Because if you do as you should, this moment will be your kingdom, your empire, your conquest, your world-mastery."

"A touch will waken things, then?" I sat down on the bench in front of the cafe. Almost at my toe poised a big spider, rigid as a metal toy out of a box of prize candy. I stepped toward it, but for some reason decided against touching it. "Look here, Last Man. How did you manage all this? If time stands still in this district, it must stand still everywhere. The world, the universe—"

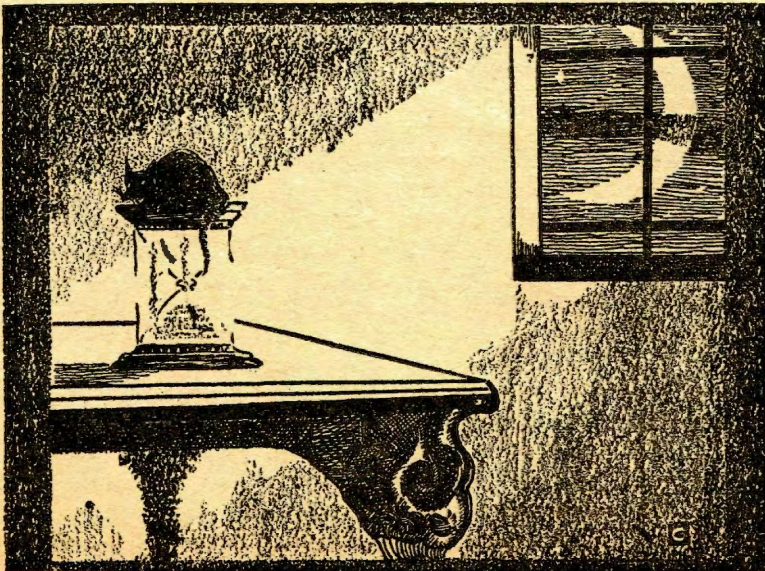
"It's too simple for you to comprehend," he interrupted with what, in someone else, might have been pomposity.

"But your machine—"

"Must there be a machine? Of course, that's what you'd expect. Some wonderful device that can conquer time and space, and once understood be a wonder no longer, like a walkie-talkie radio or the like. No, it's a principle. I involved myself in it, and you. Let me see how to illustrate . . ."

He shut his brilliant eyes, his lips moved slightly.

"Maybe I can draw a rough parallel," he



said after a moment. "Imagine yourself travelling, by train or car or afoot. You are going from one place to another. The landscape you see changes, moves, replaces itself. In some such way you go through time. You stop—in your journey, or in time—and all stands still. That need not mean a change in the landscape, or awareness of change. You yourself are pausing, that's all. You and I. Or else, you and I have been accompanying the world in its time-journey, and we've stopped and let it go ahead. We occupy the bit of time-landscape the rest have left behind."

"I get something of that," I told him. "The world moves ahead without us."

"Without us," he agreed. "At least, I suppose so—don't ask even me to explain what goes on in time while you and I have left those moments up ahead. I daresay that, after some hours or even days, they'll be aware that we're not in the community any more. A mystery, eh? But they won't know that they left themselves back in this moment with us, and that we can do with them as we will, here and now."

I SANK my body forward, elbows on knees, chin bracketed in my hands. "How did you manage to include me in this—this phenomenon?"

"I almost didn't." He made a little grimace. "Suppose, when it happened, you'd have stayed rigidly still wherever you were, frozen with astonishment. You might have failed to free yourself. Of course, I'd have come along and set you free by touching you. After all, I did it as much for you as for myself. We'll be partners in—"

"In bringing this waxwork back to motion?" I barked at him, and jumped up. "Look here, you've given yourself away. You did it as much for me, as for yourself. You want to rule in this situation."

"Why not? I didn't like the world as I'd found it when I came back to it—"

"Curse you for meddling with nature!"

"That primitive belief in curses," he snickered, and I took a sudden step toward him.

I may or may not have meant violence as I moved, but he read my mind more clearly than I had it made up. He leaped

back against the door of the cafe, darted a hand into his pocket, and whipped it out with something small and shiny in it. "Make one wrong move," he warned me, "and you'll be disintegrated out of this moment and every other."

What he held was at once strange and wicked-seeming. It looked like a round, palm-sized metal egg, with keys or studs on its surface and a narrow hollow tube. When Last Man closed his hand upon it, his fingertips covered the studs and the tube thrust out between thumb and index finger toward me, like the muzzle of a gun. I moved no more, but bode tense, angry, waiting for—

"You're waiting for me to get off guard, you stupid, ungrateful animal," he said to me. "You think to attack me, to stop all this. You've judged me in your poor, simple, limited apology for a brain, and found me wanting. Isn't that so?"

It was so. I nodded.

"You won't realize that the world and everybody in it is headed for misery and then destruction; that you and I have our chance to save it—"

"For what?" I asked. "We're to waken up a handful of people and try to do things better than the universal system has done? Is that it?"

"Exactly. And—"

"And I can't do the job. And I don't trust you."

HE SMILED. "You were wiser than either of us knew when you said that a dog would be better for me than you. I gave you life, didn't I, when everyone else was frozen? Aren't you grateful?"

"Call it off, Last Man."

"I'll call you off." He came toward me, stood at the end of the bench. He pointed the shiny thing in his hand. "You'll drop out of sight, out of reality."

I lifted a foot and put it on the other end of the bench, and set my elbow on my upthrust knee. I meant to pose with scornful nonchalance, but it did not work. He wagged his head mockingly.

"You're afraid to die, and you're going to. I'm disappointed in you, and in myself for thinking you'd serve. Now—"

The strange weapon lifted in his hand, and involuntarily I started back. My foot pressed down the end of the bench, and the other end flew up and struck his fist. He cried out, and the shiny thing flew away out of his grasp. I never saw where it went, then or later, because I jumped upon him.

His slim body was like a mass of living wires, but I tripped and threw him, and held him there, my hands at his throat. He struggled under me, caught my wrists in his own hands, trying to pry himself loose. His face writhed into a furious distorted mask of pain and fury.

"No—" he said. "No—if you—don't let go—"

I dragged him upright and slammed him against the front of the cafe, meaning to strike him hard in the face, hard enough to bash the back of his head against the wood and stun him. He dodged free of me with a catlike agility and ran, stooping and looking for his weapon. I leaped and brought him down with a flying tackle, scrambling upon him again.

"Then I'll go—" he said. "Some other age—"

Did you ever clutch at mist, thinking it solid? Just so did he dwindle in my grappling arms. I clamped them tight, and he was less than empty garments in them, less than film or web, less than air. He was gone. I rose, feeling stupid and tricked, and looked around for the weapon he had dropped. It was gone, too. Perhaps it vanished with him into whatever place he had gained.

That place—where? He had spoken, while he dwindled in my grasp, of some other age. Maybe he had achieved it, travelled again in that time he claimed to master. And I was left alone, in the locked moment.

I headed home, knowing how strange home would be. As I came toward Ted Follett's car, I resolutely refused to turn aside, even to look at Ruthie. If I touched her, she'd waken, Last Man had said. I'd have her in this suspended moment of horror. What then? Better never to find out. Back I came into my own yard back to the sycamore, near which the birds

hung suspended in motionless mid-flutter.

I wanted to get away from it, to forget, to pass out of existence. I combed my memory for some hint of what to do. Last Man had dropped one or two half-clues, true or false. *Suppose, when it happened, you'd have stayed rigidly still wherever you were.* . . . How then had I stood? *You might have failed to free yourself.*

. . . By chance I'd come free and moving in the motionlessness of the eternal moment. From a stance against the sycamore, yes. The thing to do was get into the same position, as nearly as possible. Then, perhaps, I'd be locked into the moment and be as other men and other things, not alone. Would it work? I dared not wonder what would follow if it didn't work.

I saw, at the root of the sycamore, the prints of my feet. Turning, I set my feet back in them, and rested my shoulders against the trunk. My hands—the right had been in my jacket pocket, so, and my left hanging down. And I'd been looking at the birds, my head tilted at this angle. Now. If I held my breath, possibly—

With an abrupt suddenness, the birds began to dart, whirl and wheel before me.

Once again I started away from the sycamore. I jostled a myrtle bush, and it waved and rustled. Out along the sand road I heard the rumble of a motor, and nearer at hand the whicker of an insect. I glanced up at the roof. The smoke was lazily curling and spreading there, as it had done before, in a bewilderingly natural way.

Release, release—all was as it had been, because I'd come back to fit into the proper place in the moment—all was as it had been, save for Last Man, who had never belonged among us anyway, not in our age and moment.

A car was stopping around the corner of the house. I started to walk in that direction, heavily and wonderingly. I saw the door of the car open, and Ruthie getting out. Ted Follett backed his car away and departed.

"I said I was coming," Ruthie called to me. "If you won't come to me, I must come to you. Ted was big about it, he even said he'd drive me here—wished us good luck."

"Two Face"—FRANK BELKNAP LONG

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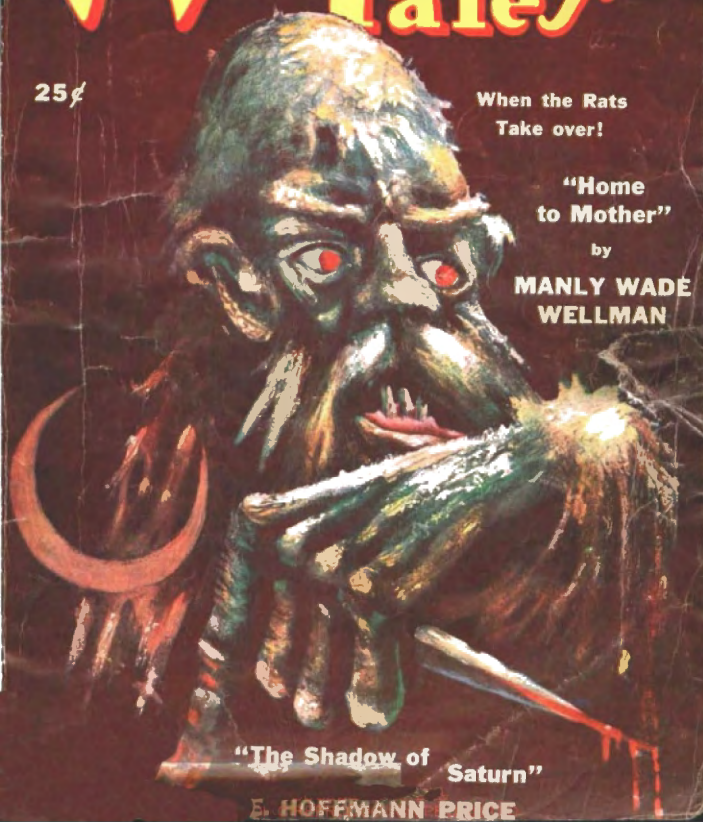
"Home
to Mother"

by

MANLY WADE
WELLMAN

"The Shadow of Saturn"

E. HOFFMANN PRICE



*Next to humanity, rats are perhaps
best fitted to conquer and rule*

How to MOTHER



Heading by Lee Brown Coye

By Manly Wade Wellman

FOREWORD

GREETINGS, you future generations! When you read this, you'll be the present generations. I'll have returned to Earth's dust, from which my own forefathers sprang, but to which I was born a stranger.

Forgive my poor writing, pay attention to the importance of this document, first to be written on Mother Earth since thirty thousand Earth-years ago. Whole libraries of history will tell you how the ancients tried foolishly to settle their overpopulation problems by long, destroying wars; how, about midway through their last war, several hundred smart, sane men and women retreated by spacecraft to Venus; how they settled and flourished there, profiting partially by Earth's bad example; and how they attempted a return to the home-world. My story begins there.

Read it. Commit it to memory. Never forget Dawes Wickram, the first human creature to return to Earth, who died to make possible your life here. Don't forget his comrades—Marna Murray and me—who lived to make it possible. I am Simion Roper. This is how I saw matters fall out, believe me!

“ARE your engines cut, Roper?” Captain Dawes Wickram called through the speaker-system from Control. “Lock feed and gauges, then come out.”

I'd been alone in Engines Left, with just room to turn around and handle fuel mixture and tempo at word from Control and to lie on my elasto-cot when power switched to Engines Right. Thirty days I'd been in that cell smaller than a prison cell, cramped by walls studded with dials, levers; stop-cocks, gauges, blast-rhythmers to power our space shooter. Cell, engines, elasto-cot, desk with slide rules and computationers for figuring engine-dope, water tap and synthetic rations. At least twice daily, never less than once and often five or six times, I'd thought I should have let them kill me back home on Venus. Now it must be nearly over.

“Yes, sir,” I told the speaker, did what

he said to do to gauges and reeds. My door unlocked smoothly, and there stood Dawes Wickram, as I'd seen him last.

Bony slim, even slimmer than I'd become in that wearing month, face skull-gaunt but with no skull grin or soft stare. His lips were lock-panel tight, his eyes probe-ray brilliant. He looked dressed for inspection—silk-metal everywhere, none of your low-caste elasroid. His shoulder-tabs and brassards of captain's rank shone like heat lines. Ditto his silverite belt, his electro-automatic pistol, his hand-throw ray, his ceremonial dagger. Sharp was the word for Dawes Wickram's rigout, and for his attitude and his nature. “Come out into the passage,” he invited.

Thirty days long I'd seen only my engine workings. I moved out at his gesture, into a broad corridor that led forward to Control. Wickram held a speaker-mike, and touched a stud. “All right, Murray,” he said into it. “You come out, too.”

He touched the catch of a panel beside the one I'd come out at. It opened, and forth stepped a slim little slice of a young woman, in brown elasroid slacks and jersey. She looked pale alongside Wickram's aristocratic lamp-tan, probably looked pale alongside my sudden blush. Her roan blonde hair was cut at ear-length. Round cheeks, big eyes and short straight nose kept her pointed chin from looking harsh. That was Engines Right—I hadn't expected my opposite number to be female. Hadn't even wondered.

“Simion Roper, this is Marna Murray,” said Wickram.

“Are we coasting in to Earth?” asked Marna Murray. Her voice was awake, but husky, as if by sleep.

“Coasting in?” he repeated, grinning with tight lips. “We're in. Come forward to control and look out the view panel.”

We followed him, and he lounged against the control board to let us have a good look through the glassite pane.

It was dark outside, almost but not quite. I could see that we'd landed. He hadn't even called us out to watch ourselves set down, and he'd managed it so carefully that the craft hadn't so much as bumped. Up ahead was a gloomy horizon,

with hills, and a touch of rose in the low sky—dawn.

But if Wickram had meant to cheat us out of all the drama, he failed, at least with Marna Murray. "The first human beings to come here in sixty thousand years—forty thousand Earth-years," she figured from Venus time. Her voice was rapt. "I wonder if we can even exist here."

WICKRAM had been flicking gauges to sample the atmosphere. "Oxygen, nitrogen and carbon dioxide," he reported. "Some bacteria, but probably our inoculations will fight them off. Now stand by for blaze signal to be observed on Venus."

Into the gloom around us spray-nozzles operated as he touched their controls. Forward, backward, to each side, he was strewing explosive powder.

"Now," he said, thumbing a spark button. Outside a bright glow, ghastly pale, deep red, turning green, then blue, then pale yellow, then red again, then all gone. My glimpse of it blinded me, and Marna Murray turned her face away. Wickram hadn't looked up.

"In thirty seconds we go out," he announced. "Me first, then Roper, then Murray."

That's the order in which three human beings again set foot on Mother Earth. Dawn was peeping over those distant hills. The air was fresher and bracing than the heavy Venusian atmosphere, and under our feet the powder-burned soil steamed from that signal blaze.

Marna Murray breathed deeply. "We're here," she said.

"And we'll stay," added Wickram. "Even if we had tools enough, we couldn't put this craft in flight order. So stop being shy, you two. Make friends. Plainly you dislike me, and I'm the only other human being on Earth."

"Are you sure, Captain Wickram?" asked Marna Murray, and we looked where she was looking, toward those heights.

The sun was rising above them. Here and there, on a saw-toothed series of hill-tops, rose columns of smoke. I counted four. Wickram muttered "Gods," I think;

he was a pantheist, like most Venusian intellectuals. He whipped telegoggles from his belt pouch and clamped them over his eyes.

"I see fire at one point," said Marna Murray. "Perhaps volcanic—"

"No," declared Wickram. "It's carbon smoke. Probably wood. Maybe coal."

"Forest fires, set by lightning?" I offered stupidly.

"No, they wouldn't be spaced like that. Murray, you're right to doubt my statement about being the only human creatures here."

I blew out my breath. "Men—human creatures? Earth's inhabited, after all!"

"But not necessarily by anyone we'd care to know," said Wickram.

The sun came up, smaller than on Venus, but direct and warm in the clear atmosphere. I, for one, felt spacy and open all around, after a lifetime in the misty jungles of Venus. We saw where we were. Behind, to the west, beat surf on a white, sandy beach, and there were sparse weeds and grass where our blaze powder hadn't burned them away. Watching those hills, eight or ten miles off, we saw that they were timbered here and there. The distant columns of smoke wavered in a morning breeze.

"Signal fires?" asked Wickram gently. "Or perhaps cooking fires?"

"We should find out," said Marna Murray eagerly. She looked ready to hike off toward the hills.

"Later." Wickram was sharp. "We're strangers. Let's be sure of our welcome."

He had us carry load after load of tools and supplies from the freight-chamber. We put them between our scorched landing spot and the sea. He was all captain, finding plenty for us to do, but not hoisting or hauling himself. The day was bright by the time we'd finished the detail, and when we looked to the hills again, the smoke columns were gone, as if they hadn't been there—or had been put out.

"Break out rations, Roper," Wickram ordered me.

I was struck by a feeling of strangeness that we were eating synthetic loaves on this

planet; or maybe by a sense of being watched and evaluated. Marna Murray broke off small bits of her loaf, and once she smiled courteously at me, making me wish I hadn't just gnawed into mine. Wickram had drawn his dagger to cut thin slices. He was supposed to be elegant. "Roper," he said, munching, "they sentenced you for refusal to let Mating Bureau choose your proper consort, and then let you go when you volunteered for this mission. Right?"

"Right," I grumbled, resenting his manner.

"You're applied-science grouping," he half accused. "It's important for applied-science personnel to marry other applied-science personnel. Then progeny can be conditioned to the same needed assignment."

"I wanted to choose my own consort," I began.

"Oh, yes. You'd picked a girl from art-and-culture classification, a luxurious singing girl—"

"She wouldn't have me," I snarled. "Took a district recreationalist. I took a conviction. Only for this assignment, I'd be dead now."

"Murray," said Wickram, slicing into his loaf. "You, too, chose between execution and this mission."

"Right," said Marna Murray, barely audible. She looked away from us.

"Not as romantic as Roper, eh, Murray? Just too busy with some absorbing calculation-experiment to marry, particularly sight unseen. But," and he laughed, without parting his lips, "here you both are—"

"Captain, if you're hinting the truth, it's rotten!" I cried, and swung around toward him. He lifted his dagger, warningly.

"Good guess, Roper. Mating Bureau told you off for each other. I thought you'd like to know—and Mating Bureau got you assigned to the mission."

He chuckled, and that was the last sound until we'd finished eating. Then Marna Murray looked toward the hills again. "To think of being here," she mur-

mured. Glancing at her, I saw that she wasn't as gaunt as I'd first thought. Slender, but not frail or bony. The sun was making her pale face rosy, too.

"We're going to explore," said Wickram. "Murray, remain on guard here. Take an electro-automatic rifle from the case yonder. Patrol around the ship and the supply dump. Observe in all directions. You're in charge until we return."

She got the rifle. "Another for Roper," bade Wickram. "Ready, Roper? Come on."

Side by side we set off inland across open, level ground. I glanced back, and Marna Murray, patrolling as ordered, was watching us. Later I glanced again, and she still watched, but she and all she guarded looked small, far away, like practically nothing across the distance we had covered.

Anybody who's been in the Venusian jungles, with clouds shoving down overhead, can guess how open and insecure a Venus-bred man would feel in such territory for the first time. I did, but if Wickram did he gave no sign of it. Once he dipped up sand and ran a quick chemical test with reagents from his belt-pouches. "Gather some grass and weed specimens," he told me. "And some of those broad-leaved plants up ahead."

We'd come two or three miles, and approached a patch of healthy-looking vegetables. Wickram, moving ahead, clucked in surprise. "Interesting growth arrangement, Roper."

It was all of that. Tufty, big-leaved plants lay in rows upon soft, dark earth. "Cultivated," said Wickram, stooping and tugging the nearest plant. Out came its broad, round root, white with a purple tinge. "That's a turnip," Wickram told me, handing it over.

You know I stared. On Venus, things like that were grown artificially and painstakingly, under glass, with special light and fertilizer. They're only for the aristocrats, the leaders and top technical chiefs. The rest of us eat synthetics, from the Venusian plants. Moving past the turnips, Wickram gouged up another plant, with lighter, fluffier top leaves. It appeared

from the earth long and tapering, like a dagger blade, but of a sweet orange tint. "Carrot," he said "And yonder—I think they're cabbages."

I pulled up three or four more turnips. Wickram appropriated several carrots. "Not too many, Roper. If we plunder this garden, its gardener may visit us to ask why."

Again I had that sense of being watched, curiously and closely, by invisible eyes. We headed back toward our base.

"Roper," said Wickram as we tramped along with our vegetables, "why do you think there's a garden here, with no other evidence of human habitation or culture?"

"Maybe growing conditions are bad on the hills," I suggested.

"Maybe. But then why isn't the gardener's home next to his garden?"

"It seems strange, Captain."

"Probably the gardener has a good reason to build fires on the hill and grow his food on the level. Well, we're home again."

The grounded hull, the supply dump, and Marna Murray watching us come in gave me a sense of known facts about where I stood.

BUT Wickram wasn't back at camp to stay. He turned the guard detail over to me, and took Marna Murray with him to explore the beach. Watching them go, I felt lonelier than when I'd headed toward the hills. Marna Murray acted glad to go with him—he was attractive to her, probably he could be attractive to any woman if he wanted to be. When they returned, they carried their hands and pockets full of small irregular objects.

"Fauna," pronounced Wickram, dropping his cargo on a waterproof sheet. "Shellfish, our ancestors called them. Here's an oyster," and he lifted one. "These are clams. You've seen their pictures in ancient books, Roper. My tests show they're edible. We'll eat them and our vegetables for our second meal on Earth."

"What are those empty shells?" I asked.

He handed me one. "More evidence of

human life. See where the hinge membrane was cut—not broken or pulled apart, but severed with a sharp instrument to get at the animal inside."

"Sharp instrument?" I echoed.

"Look," Marna Murray exhibited a knife of sorts, crude, rusty and broken. It was of simple iron, the kind that's easily smelted out of ore by a hot open fire. The broken blade was bound into a bone handle with mouldy old cord, and had been sharpened away to a scrap. When the scrap had broken, its owner had tossed it away.

"Our neighbors eat flesh as well as plants," Wickram said. "Look at the hilt-lashings of rawhide, dried and shrunken to clasp blade to handle. Primitive but skilful. Apparently living through the final war was a wipeout for civilization here, and people have progressed back to a simple iron age."

"Iron age," I repeated, remembering my school days. "Emerging from the stone age, men learned to work together, be friends, live together, produce thinkers and heroes—"

"Like Moses," added Marna Murray. "Mohammed, Hannibal, Aristotle, Homer. And poets and scientists." She sounded raptly joyous. "They prepared the ground for Leonardo da Vinci, Isaac Newton, Darwin, Einstein—"

"Who prepared it for the inventors that invented civilization clear out of existence," finished Wickram harshly. "Get that thermal canister heating, Murray. We'll eat some of what we've found."

We played safe and boiled the things, but they were good. I could have taken seconds and thirds. After eating, Wickram went into the ship, probably to lie down. Marna Murray was looking at that crude broken knife. "Poor fellow," she barely whispered.

"The man with the knife?" I suggested, wondering what she meant.

"He worked so hard, Roper. Stoked his fire to smelt the ore. Toiled at some crude forge, shaping it. Blistered his hands edging it. Painstakingly carved the handle, lashed it with rawhide. Back on Venus, a

machine turns out by the thousand, such knives as he'd think were miracles."

I half drew my own steel blade, graceful, strong, beautifully tempered and sharpened. I saw what she meant.

"He used this to the limit," she went on. "Then had to toil to make another. Life's hard for him, Roper. He and his people live on the hills. They're timid, they seek shelter there. Now we've frightened them away from their gardens, and from coming to the seashore after shell-fish." She looked at me with wide, troubled eyes.

"You're supposed to have scientific detachment," I tried to tease her, but she shook her head. The roan hair stirred.

"No, scientific detachment isn't for me or you. It's for superior I. Q.'s and trainings and advantages, like Captain Wickram's. He's interested, but he isn't sorry. He doesn't care whether those people up on the hill live or die."

"He's cautious—" I began.

"But he took their vegetables, their needed food." Her words made me ashamed that I'd helped him. "Not a sign that he'll help them in return."

"Nobody was at the garden," I reminded.

"They fear us—we're terrible to them. Else they'd be there, digging or harvesting, and we'd see them and get to know them." She pointed to the hills. "And they put out their fires. This isn't the way we should come home to Mother Earth."

I felt the warmth of her impulse, and my own impulses warmed to match them—then, beyond, I saw Wickram grinning at us through the port. For the moment I felt like punching his lean, mocking face. To him we were two subordinates, mated by decision of a bureau, and he was pleased to see us getting together. He came out.

"Don't let my presence make you shy," he called. "Be friendly. Stroll around. Get to know each other. My blessing on you."

He went back in. Marna Murray watched him go, thinking. Then she put her hands inside a ration container.

"I'll give them something to pay for those vegetables," she said. "It can be part of my own ration, I'll eat less for a day or so. This synthetic loaf—it'll be novel, they might like it."

OFF she started, toward the vegetable field. I watched, then followed, and caught up as she reached the plot. She laid the loaf down on the broad leaves of a turnip plant.

"They can have this too," I said. Stripping off my belt, with the knife in its elascoid sheath, I put it down beside the loaf.

"That was kindly," said Marna Murray, but I only half heard. From the dirt I picked up something—a bone.

It was a thigh bone, short and sturdy, and it had been cooked. The two of us studied it narrowly.

"Maybe they have domestic animals, too," said Marna Murray. "What kind? That bone doesn't match anything we've ever seen." Then, "I know why Wickram doesn't want us to meet the people on the hill."

"He'd prefer us to have nobody to associate with except each other," I suggested.

I hadn't, but now I did. Women like the legends—straight, strong, graceful, with flowing hair and brilliant eyes. "And you're thinking about the heroic Iron Age men," I teased back, as we headed away.

"I'm just thinking about people," said she. "They'd be friends—why not, Roper? They descended from our same stock. They'll be like us, except for education—even so, they'll have knowledge we don't. Each could give the other something."

She made them sound attractive, understandable, those people on the hills.

When we got back Wickram was outside, and found details that kept us busy the rest of the day. It passed quickly—we figured it twenty-four hours to one revolution, less than an eighteenth of a Venus day. "I'll take first watch tonight," said Wickram. "Quarters, you two. Murray takes over in three hours, and Roper gets the final watch until dawn."

MY WATCH, at least, was so quiet as to be wearing. The moon came up, nearly full, making the sky pale around it. It lighted the sand, the distant sea, and in the other directions the distant hills. Fires were back on them, pointy flashes of light, and as the moon descended over that way I saw smokes. So, I said to myself, we've worried and daunted the Earth people into coming out at night only. Hefting my electro-automatic trifle. I realized they were right in thinking our strangeness a terror. Iron age versus electro-automatic age, space-ship age, was no contest.

At dawn the fires died again. Out looked Wickram, beckoning me in. From inside I watched him spray the blaze powder, then touch it into series-color of flame. "Our second signal to Venus," he said. "Now others—not only one small craft like ours, but several, with something like a fair number—will take off. Our third and last blaze, before dawn tomorrow, will give them the reference point toward which to make way and join us."

Marna Murray, too, had seen the fires during the night. "I wonder about their language," she said as we emerged for the first meal. "Ours, as the speech experts have decided, has hardly changed in all the centuries—we talk substantially as our forbears did when they reached Venus, except for technical terms. Possibly those people up yonder could understand us, and we could understand them."

"Oh," said Wickram, slicing his loaf of synthetic, "you want to go talk to them."

"More than anything else in life!" cried Marna Murray, in outright hunger for the experience. "Let's do it."

"Let's do nothing of the sort, Murray," replied Wickram harshly. "We stay and hold on here, until our reinforcements arrive."

"Reinforcements," I repeated. "That sounds military. Like war."

"It might be just that," said Wickram, more harshly still. "Again, it mightn't. But we don't go to them, or near them, without being strong enough to finish anything they start. Make no mistake, you two.

I was briefed thoroughly for what we hope to do here. Return to Earth means mastery of Earth, and no nonsense about it. Any terms made will be made by us. Understand? Any questions?"

Neither Marna Murray nor I asked any.

"Very well. Roper, you've just come off watch. You're allowed a rest period, sleep if you wish."

Obediently I went in to my quarters and lay down on the elasto-cot. After a while I slept, but not soundly, and not for long. When I woke up again, I washed and went to the lock-panel. I saw nobody for a moment, then Marna Murray strolled into view, rifle over her arm, on guard. She was alone, Wickram was away somewhere.

"Where's the Captain?" I asked her.

"She nodded seaward. I looked, and saw a distant speck in the waters near shore. Wickram was swimming. Relaxing. And I welcomed the chance to talk to Marna Murray without his listening or watching. Marna, I saw in a moment, welcomed the chance, too.

"Captain Wickram is really all alone here," she said. "We—we're two more of his useful machines. A word operates us, instead of a touch-button or lever. We sometimes show hesitancy or slowness in doing our job—then there's a sharp word, like a solvent or lubricant, to get us efficient again. We're supposed to be good machines, Roper. Working machines, carrying machines—fighting machines, if so be he decides fighting must be done."

"It wouldn't be fighting," I said, looking up at the hills where the fires showed no more. "Just killing. Effortless, bore-some killing."

"Have you ever wanted to kill anyone, Roper?"

I shook my head. "Once or twice I have thought of killing myself," I said, remembering the black hours after I'd heard that my girl wasn't my girl. "I know that's a crime, thinking such things, Murray. But I'm safe in telling you." And I knew that I was.

Her eyes were on the hills. "Of course," she said, "he'll find war—extermination—necessary. They aren't machines. They

haven't been in the machine age yet, so they can't be. Inasmuch as they won't be machines, Wickram won't let them be men. He'll destroy them. If there are other communities, they'll perish, too."

"Will Wickram have the say-so?" I argued. "Higher command than he will be here pretty soon."

"But he'll have been here long enough to have formed a plan that the others will listen to. Roper, do you like being a machine?" She stared earnestly into my eyes. "You tried to protest once."

"No, I don't like being a machine. What else is there, in our particular culture?"

"It's not a natural culture," she said. "On Venus, we arrived as alien beings. We set up, and we have developed and followed, an unnatural culture. But here, we're back home. Home to mother—Mother Earth. We can be natural again, like those." She gestured largely toward the hills. "Roper, I'm not going to stay under Wickram's thumb, like a touch-button. I'm going up to those people."

"You'd dare that?"

"Why not? They're afraid of us. When I showed them they needn't be afraid, they'd be friends. Why not? They live naturally, happily. They grow their food, and it's delicious, a pleasure to eat. They warm themselves by fires they light and fuel naturally. They make their tools and shelters with their hands. They're not savages, and they're not machines either. I'm going to them."

She threw down her rifle and started. I moved after her. "Not going to take arms?"

"I don't want to arrive on such a basis," she insisted. "But I ran back to our supplies, found and opened an arms-chest and took out two electro-automatic pistols. Running to catch up with her, I pushed one pistol into her hands."

"Keep this," I begged. "Keep it out of sight, if you want to, but keep it. If you never need it, so much the better."

She thrust it into her belt-pouch. "What I'm bringing," she said, "are the things really worth offering. Medicines. Chemical agents for tests and sterilizing

work. A little book full of useful hints—cloth-weaving, well-digging, so on. Maybe I can teach them while they teach me. Roper, do you think you want to go along?"

I did want to go along. I was going along. But it wasn't so much leaving Wickram as staying with Marna Murray. We moved fast, yard after yard, furlong after furlong, putting distance between us and the supply base. When Wickram came back from his swim, we wanted to be beyond his sternly summoning voice.

We paused by the vegetable field. We looked for the knife and synthetic loaf, and they were gone. "See, Roper?" said Marna Murray. "They accepted our presents." She smiled over it. "Good will established, or started, anyway."

"We're going to be renegades," I reminded her. "Remember, when the others come, Wickram will tell them about that."

"All right, we'll be renegades. We'll also be patriots. People of Earth, not invaders. We'll make our friends understand their danger, make them ready to resist or retreat before it's too late."

She was full of plans and hope. So was I. We slogged away past the vegetables, and on over a level that was more heavily grassed in, toward the hills where we'd seen the fires.

"Roper, I'm glad you're coming with me," she said. "If it's to be war—and Wickram's going to make it war—I want you to be on the same side with me."

"I'm on the same side with you," I told her. As we walked along, we put out hands and touched, then clasped. Her hand was small, strong and warm.

EARTH, I thought as we trudged along, was older than Venus, a mature world and habituated and fit for full life. Venus, after all, was in the making, and not ready or hospitable as yet, even after all the centuries of grim, contrived human existence there. Almost as bad, perhaps, as worn-out, senile Mars. But Earth—we belonged here, Murray and I. We and our people should never have left. These other people had managed. They were better than we,

because they'd stayed and seen it through, profited by mistakes.

They hadn't, I thought, failed to profit by the mistake of too much civilization. The iron age they lived in—it isn't as though they needed thousands upon thousands of years to work up to that. They'd achieved the iron age, out of the wreck of their former civilization after the war, and sensibly levelled off there. The iron age, the classic age—out of an iron age had come the Iliad, the Ten Commandments, the legends of the Round Table, a million good things that the machine age had no time to emulate or even imitate.

We were at the foot of the hills. We had passed a couple of other vegetable fields, and at one of them we had stopped and plucked vegetables, eating them raw and tasty for the noon meal. Now it was afternoon, and the grounded space ship far away toward the sea was only a tiny dull-glowing thumb of metal. Wickram, if he were there, would be too small to see. We didn't look for him. We started to climb the nearest and lowest hill, and after a while we found a worn, hard-tramped trail that led us knowledgeably up in the best way. We topped the hill, and there was nothing but the trail down the other side, across a little dip, and up the larger hill beyond, toward the summit of the saw-toothed range.

"The first thing to do," said Marna Murray, who seemed to be giving us the orders, but gentle, pleasant orders, none of Wickram's sharp-and-no-nonsense style; "is to build their fires for them. Show that they can have fires by daylight, like honest, natural people. After that, see if they can understand us."

I did touch my pistol, stuck down in the waistband of my elasroid trousers, but I felt guilty at mistrusting our new friends in advance. For a moment I wondered if some of them—sages or mystics—might not be able to read minds, and would distrust people who came smiling among them with concealed weapons. I contemplated throwing the gun away, but I didn't. We went downhill along the trail, and then uphill, uphill for nearly an hour. It

was a high hill, several hundred feet as I judged, not difficult climbing in any single point, but sustained effort. We were both panting a little when we came to the top.

The top levelled off, and there were rocks around us, big ones singly and smaller ones in heaps, nowhere higher than my head. No people, and no sign of them, except a mark of black cinders and gray ashes where a fire had been, and a stack of wood, some of it broken into lengths, some of it chopped into lengths.

"They've seen us coming!" cried Marna Murray in self-accusation. "They've run away from their own fireplace."

And there was a tear in her eye, caught by the last gleam of the sinking sun. We'd been all day making the journey.

"If they've retreated, we can hardly follow them as it gets darker," I said, feeling let down, the way she did. "Let's eat. I brought provisions."

"But first," said Marna Murray, "let's build up their fire for them. Build it up big and bright and cheerful. Maybe they'll see it, and think that some of their party is here, and is signalling for them to come back."

"How do you build a fire?" I asked, for I didn't know. I'd never had a fire to build in all my life on Venus, where everything is touch-button and lever-switch.

"You find out," said Marna Murray, and laughed at me.

We had a time of it. Our first two attempts were failures. Then I came back a bit from the iron age, producing a pellet from the electro-automatic magazine, laying it on a flat piece of wood and carefully crushing down with another. It burst into explosive flame, of course, and Marna Murray was ready with other bits of wood. That start was soon able to take care of anything we cared to give it. It mastered sticks and chunks of fuel, smouldering up and then darting up tongues of flame that crackled and rattled. The darkness was settling and thickening in around us, but that fire of ours drove it back with vigorous driving strokes of rich red light. All at once I understood the ancient enthusiasms,

as expressed in classic poetry, for the open wood fire. It meant comfort, protection, comradeship, rest, relaxation, jollity.

"They'll certainly see that," prophesied Marna Murray. "They'll see it, and understand."

She sat down, cross-legged, and beamed at me. I beamed back at her. I was glad of her company. I was almost sorry for Wickram, without his two subordinate human beings to carry out his orders and make him feel commanding and masterful. I broke out rations, and we divided them, Marna Murray and I. We found them delicious. We relaxed. For a little while we forgot what we were there for—I, at least, didn't care whether the settlers on the hill came back to us or not. Marna Murray sang a little. After a time she said, "Look over on the next hill, Simon."

She hadn't called me Roper. I looked, and I saw another fire over there.

"It must be a sort of a signal back to us," said Marna Murray. "But they're still shy and timid, aren't they?"

"They seem to be staying away," I agreed, and at that moment there was a sort of harsh, creaky rustling. We both looked in that direction. A long, slender body lifted itself, within the outer ring of the firelight.

"A man!" cried Marna Murray.

But it wasn't a man.

THE body was a long one, rusty pink and bald looking. A head was set on top of it without benefit of neck, and short, crooked arms moored to either side without benefit of shoulders. It would have been as tall as I am if the legs hadn't been short and crooked, too. The thing's height was mostly body, and it stood, perhaps, as tall as my armpit. The head was round, and in the firelight gleamed its two eyes, cold green. Its mouth was open and toothy, and out of the mouth came the creaky rustling sound.

I jumped up from where I'd been sitting beside Marna Murray. At that another creaky rustling sound broke out behind me, in answer to the first, and other long-bodied things came slinking in from all around us.

"Look out, 'Marna," I said softly, and set my hand on the butt of the gun. "They—"

They looked like rats, I thought. I saw that the round heads had upcocked wide ears and sharp, front-jutting muzzles and no chins at all. The only hair on them seemed to be bristly mustache whiskers, fanning out to either side. There were a dozen of them ringed around us, and more slipping into sight from openings under the rock-piles. They seemed to move on all fours or upright with equal readiness. They were closing in the circle they'd drawn around our fire. Once or twice a big one chattered, and seemed to be directing the others.

I thought of rats because I knew what rats looked like. Rats were the only animals, other than selected domestic species, that had made the space-ship jump from Earth to Venus in the old days, and they had bred, developed and multiplied there, shrewd, rugged and stubborn. Where some of the domestic types had died out completely, and the others become weak, scarce strains, the rats had made good on Venus.

Marna Murray had the same thought. I heard her say, "Rats," in a horror-hushed voice, as they closed in.

I drew my gun and pointed it, at the biggest of the creatures, but I reckoned without some of his companions. They were upon me so fast that it was like being hit by huge, flying raindrops—filthy raindrops, that smelled like sweat and spoiled meat. A pair of arms grabbed my right arm, sharp nails dug through my elasroid sleeve. Another weight fastened itself to my back, another around my legs. Down I went in a heap.

Marna Murray screamed, and rushed. Her gun was out, too, and working. She poured explosive pellets into the creatures that swarmed over me, knocking them loose from me. One, another, a third—and then her gun worked no more. She'd squeezed down the trigger and fired charge after charge until they were all gone. Next moment, they had her, too.

"Simon!" she called out to her only friend on that whole world, and I tried to

struggle free and help her. Next moment I was hit somewhere on the head, and the firelight faded from in front of my eyes.

I wakened to find myself bound tightly. Whoever had tied me up knew the tie-up business. Not only my arms and legs, but my neck and heels and thumbs and toes were lashed and swathed with lines. I lay with my back against a big stone, and in the light of the fire I saw Marna, also tied and helpless, against another stone facing me. Her hair was mussed into a tangle, her jersey and slacks were torn, and her eyes were wide and blank.

"Marna," I said.

"Hello, Simon," she said back. All around us sounded the rustling voices of our captors. "We were wrong, weren't we? About these lords and masters of Mother Earth."

"What are they?" I asked, because wonder and mystery dominated every other matter in my mind.

"Rats," said Marna. "I've studied evolution, Simon. You know about the rays and split atoms and such things turned loose in that destroying war? Radiation can make changes in adaptations and tendencies of creatures. Whatever was to live through the catastrophe would be altered into the sort of monster that could survive. Rats—what else are these things?"

"But they act like men—" I said.

"They've developed. The changes the war made in the world's condition, and the meeting of necessity by nature. And what humanity left behind it—gardens, tools—"

That was all we had time to say. They saw we were awake, and they came about us again. Some crouched as they moved, others craned over the shoulders of the crouchers. I was stunned and nauseated by their ring of sharp muzzles and glowing eyes, and the smell of them, which I can't describe in any terms. They were snickering and chattering to each other.

"What will they do to us?" quavered Marna.

I was making a guess to myself about that. A couple of them were building a fire. It was skilfully built, that fire—they

knew how to build on, as I didn't. First a handful of small, dry twigs, then some short pieces of thicker wood, and then a sort of criss-cross of stubby pieces that would make a hot, concentrated blaze, like a—

"Cooking fire," breathed Marna, almost too softly for me to catch.

When the fire was going, the two who had made it conferred in their snickering language. One of them reached out his claw-fringed paw, and a neighbor put a knife into it, the knife I had left for a present at the vegetable field. I saw the paw close around the handle of the knife. It was only a paw, with no thumb or anything that served for a thumb—clumsy, in a way, but skilful in another, with a palm all gray-pallid—where the skin of the back, like the skin of the rest of the creature, was rusty pink. The creature tested the point of his knife on the palm of the other paw. He took hold of the knife point, and appeared to be delighted with the way the blade curved and sprung. Then he moved toward Marna, and bent above her and lifted the knife.

Just then a bright little glow showed in his side, like the striking of an electro-automatic pellet, and he spun around and dropped into slack stillness.

You should have heard the skirling and rattling chorus of their voices. The other fire-maker—it was a female, maybe the two fire-makers were mates—ran to the body and stooped to touch it. A glow exploded in the center of her low, back-slanting forehead, brighter than the fire, and she slumped across the first to fall.

The others began to mill and howl. One of the biggest pointed to me, and a louder howl went up. Several made at me, as if they thought I'd struck down their friends. I hadn't, I couldn't—I was tied like a package. I couldn't defend myself if they tried to do anything, and they were going to try. The nearest of them flashed out his talon-fringed paws, and then I heard the solid *plop* of a striking missile. He was down. Another was down, another. The night was torn and riven with the screaming of their many voices.

They didn't understand. Death had come among them. It struck them down at every movement they made toward us. All that was comprehensible about that destruction was that it came to defend us. They shrank away, all but one that might have been a chief. He was plucky, I'll give him that. He stooped and picked up the fallen dagger.

What he was going to do with it we could never tell, for his paw burst into ruddy explosion as an electro-automatic pellet struck it. And before he had the chance to look down and see what made him drop the knife, another explosion bloomed in the center of his breast and dropped him like a chunk of mud.

That was enough for the others. They turned and ran in all directions. As some of them ran in one direction by chance, they wilted and tumbled dead, and the others went the opposite way. They pulled out of there, off of the hill. We stayed alone, bound and helpless as we were; we had to stay alone, with the fire that had been stoked up to cook us, and the corpses of those horrid unguessable creatures that had been about to have a bite of us.

We were motionless and silent for what seemed hours, but was probably minutes. Then feet came scampering into hearing, and a dark, tall figure popped into view. Wickram was there, rifle in one hand, his dagger in the other, cutting our bonds.

"YOU fools," Wickram said to us, without heat, only contempt. "You two star-gazing, dream-driven fools. Lie quiet, Roper, so that I can cut you loose. Nothing would do but the best, eh? You wanted a paradise on this Earth, and you thought you'd get what you wanted."

"Get Marna out of this," I said, trying to keep my voice from shaking. "Get her out—don't mind me—"

"I've already set her free," said Wickram, "but it's informing to hear you talk like that about her. The bureau boys who tried to get you together knew what they were doing, after all."

He stooped and picked up my fallen pistol, then Marna's. "Here you are. They

let the things stay where you dropped them. Load up again, Marna." He paused and stooped down to examine one of the bodies. "Amazing. Yet, once you accept the idea, quite logical. The race of the rats was bound to come through even the worst of catastrophes, and develop—next to humanity, rats are perhaps best fitted to conquer and rule—"

"How did you get here?" I asked him.

"Followed you two deserters, of course. As it got to be dusk, I lost sight of your tracks, and went up a trail to another hill-top where there weren't any of these rat folk. From there I saw what was happening on this hill, by the firelight. I had a telescopic finder-sight on my rifle," and he held it out to us. "I could pick them off as I pleased, and I injected a little drama into it for their benefit. Let them fall as if fate had overtaken them. In a way, fate had—in my person. Simple, eh?"

Simple, yes, when Wickram was there to do it. He motioned to us.

"Back home we go. That bunch of gentry was startled away from you, but they'll get up their courage and come back. Head down the hill, Roper, and keep your eyes open and your pistol ready. Then you, Murray. I'll bring up the rear."

We departed from the hill in the order he had set up. And Wickram had been right. I suppose that rats, who hadn't come down to us as traditionally courageous except when cornered, had developed their resolution during those centuries as lords of creation. We could hear them skirling and chattering to each other. As we made it through the darkness to the top of the next hill, with the level land beyond, the moon came up. By its light, we saw distant figures fringing the heights we had left. Wickram lifted his rifle, but did not touch the trigger.

"No, let them come a little closer," he said. "Close enough to feel they threaten our escape. Then when a few of them die, it'll look like a fairly explicit warning. We can't kill them all, and the ones who are still alive must learn to be afraid of us."

"Of us three human beings!" cried

Marna incredulously, looking back. There were hundreds of the rat folk.

"Of us three human beings," agreed Wickram bleakly. "We've got to hold them off until more of us arrive to take care of them. This isn't the sort of recognizable war we could fight with other men. We can't make compromises or treaties—we must wipe them out, or be wiped out ourselves."

We reached the level ground, and moved away with what speed we could make toward the distant point where our ship was located.

It wasn't a straight journey, nor a quiet one.

The rat folk came down out of the hills behind us, though they did not try to press us any too close. They didn't feel they had to, because of what we were to find up ahead, at the vegetable patches.

Moving in advance of the others, I found it first. It was heralded by something that sang shrilly past my ear, a missile. I heard Wickram grunt behind me, the missile had hit him. Then, moving toward us in the gloom, came a skirmish line of rat folk.

One of them lifted his paw, with something in it. I aimed by guess in the darkness, and my pellet struck and lighted up his sharp, low-browed face with its explosion. Marna fired, almost over my shoulder, and knocked down another. I aimed at a third, a fourth, and both my shots told. The creatures wavered before us, retreated and at the same time bunched together. They seemed to sink into the ground, like wisps of heavy vapor.

"Rush them," Wickram was commanding. He sounded as if he had clenched his teeth. Marna and I obeyed, in time to see a sort of trapdoor closing down on a hole. So the rat folk had dens, cleverly disguised, near their vegetable patches, and stayed in them during the daylight—that solved the mystery that had perplexed Wickram and me the day before. I prodded the place with my foot. It sounded hollow when I stamped, but I couldn't make out any way to open it.

"Let me," said Wickram, coming up.

He lowered the muzzle of his rifle and let it spit a burst of pellets. They glowed and exploded in the soil, and the hole made itself visible. Thrusting his weapon down more closely into this opening, Wickram poured a longer, more concentrated series of shots into it. We heard a sudden chorus of chattering screams, which abruptly ceased.

"They'll not be any advance guard to press our retreat," said Wickram, and staggered a little.

"You're hurt," said Marna.

"Whatever that cursed beast threw nicked my arm—not deeply, but it made me feel faint."

I PICKED up something from beside the corpse I had first struck. It was a simple piece of wood, shaped like an L. In the shorter arm was a socket, and in the socket a short, heavy dart which was equipped with a metal tip.

"Like the old throwing sticks of ancient savages," said Marna. "A skilful user can double the force of his cast with it. Let's look at your wound, Captain."

She turned on a radium flash. Wickram's sleeve was torn, and blood streaked it, but the wound on his forearm was, as he had said, no more than a nick.

"On to our base," he scolded. "I'm no weakling to be fussed over."

We kept moving, though not very fast. Once or twice Wickram called out harshly for us to slow down. Back beyond him we had the awareness, though none too clear a view, of those rat folk, coming after us in a large and fairly well controlled formation. They kept their distance, but not too furtively. It was as if they were coming along to watch something.

Which is exactly what they were coming along to do.

Those of them that had popped up at the vegetable patch might have warned us, but Marna and I weren't mental like Wickram, and Wickram was suffering with that superficial but painful wound. We moved closer to our base and closer. It took several hours, and dawn was pretty nearly arrived as we came up and in a few more

moments would have headed in and been lost.

But Wickram stopped and reeled a little. Marna sprang back to him and steadied him by his elbow, and he cried out in pain.

"What is it?" I demanded. "Your wound?"

Marna turned on her flash, and we saw that his hand, wrist and forearm were swelled up like a loaf of synthetic, all angry red except at the wound. That was black.

"All right," said Wickram, still between his clenched teeth. "I didn't want to drive you two into hysterics. That dart that grazed me a little while ago was poisoned. Clever little hunting creatures, aren't they?"

"We've got to get to the ship," said Marna. "There'll be medicines—counter-agents—"

"After all these hours," said Wickram, and now he sounded just weary and gentle, "I doubt if they'll help. Roper, I don't know if you have any seniority over Murray, but when I'm done for you'll command here. I think, all things being equal, a man's a better commander than a woman."

"Get him to the ship," Murray said to me, and we turned that way. But there was a rising flicker of sound from there,

and when we looked hard in the moonlight we saw that all around our ship swarmed rat folk.

"We're trapped between two forces," said Marna, and her voice was quiet but too frightened to be desperate. "They've got us."

"No, we've got them," Wickram snarled. "You two pull out and move sideways, between the two parties, and get away toward the ocean. Let me go forward alone."

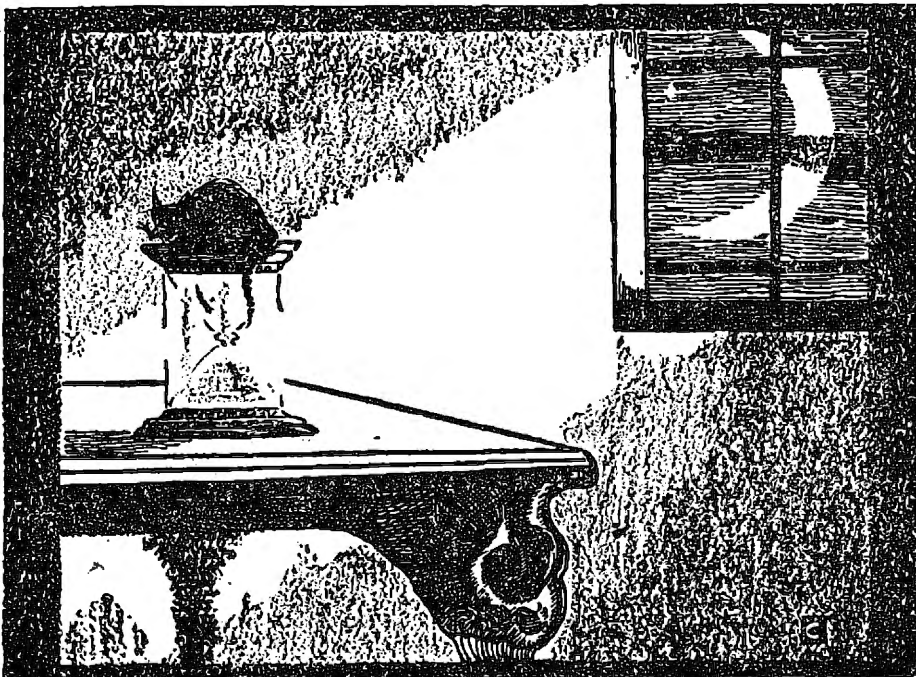
"Captain, I won't—" I began.

"You'll obey orders, Roper," he informed me in a burst of rage. "Move fast, and take Marna with you. If you follow me, or even try to follow me, I'll let you have a couple of rounds from this rifle. I mean it. Start out!"

He pulled himself together, and fairly ran toward the ship.

We paused and watched. To that extent, we disobeyed the last order he ever gave us.

The rat folk seemed to be trying to get the door of the ship open, but they paused and looked as Wickram approached. I saw him once, in a clear flash of moonlight—he had the rifle at his good shoulder, his good hand on the trigger, but the muzzle drooping toward the ground. As he came at them, I could hear the whiz of darts in the air. Probably Wickram was hit once or



twice, because he faltered, but did not slacken his pace. He came quite close to the ship, when they spread out and moved in again, as if to surround him. Then he pulled the trigger, and the pellet struck the ground in a red glow of explosion.

All the ground around the ship was lurid fire, the color of blood—then blue, green, pale yellow, red again.

Wickram must have spread his blaze signal powder for the third and final before dawn signal before he went after us.

It was blinding, that field of changing, glaring flame, sprouting up in an area all around the ship for moment after moment. When it died again, Marna and I were blinded. We held our eyes in our hands ~~until we could look again for Wickram~~ and the rat folk.

There wasn't any Wickram, and there weren't any rat folk.

THE blaze powder had whiffed them all out of existence together, every molecule of them. Wickram, with death upon him, had managed to destroy all those dozens of enemies who had closed in on him.

I yelled like an animal myself, and ran toward the place. Marna was behind me. I realized that the other rat-party was following, more slowly, and quite silent. At the edge of the smoking area where the blaze signal had gone off, taking with it so many living creatures, I turned and fired into the foremost ranks of the rat folk.

They stopped still, and they fell. For one crazy instant I imagined that my single pistol shot had stricken them all dead. Then, in the moonlight, I saw that I hadn't. They were alive, all right, but they were lying on their faces. They began to make sounds, not trills and snickers, but moans. Prone and helpless-looking, they stretched out their paws to us. One of them raised his ugly pointed face, and then shoved it back down in the sand.

I moved toward them, not caring whether I lived another second. They moaned and tried to crawl away, backwards, their faces down, their bodies hori-

zontal. They looked as if they were praying.

That was it, they were praying. They'd seen a more unthinkable and terrible destruction of their fellow-beings than the one Wickram had wrought with long-range rifle fire on the hilltop. What had he said about it? *The ones who are still alive must learn to be afraid of us.* Well, that had come to them. Fear. They had seen a single strange invader, surrounded and doomed by overwhelming numbers, simply take himself away in a fountain of many-colored fires, and with him had gone every soul that had offered him any violence.

They were beaten. They crawled, they moaned. ~~They pulled out of there.~~ Marna and I watched them going, and then, very suddenly, she fainted.

We waited outside for the dawn, and waited all the next day, and the next night. In the morning that followed, we found things brought close to our base. Stacks of vegetables, neatly arranged—carrots, turnips, cabbages, beans. On top of the pile lay something we recognized, the belt and knife I had left for them to take three nights before.

"They want to make peace with us," said Marna. "Bribe us. Buy us off."

"It's a sort of pity they can't," I replied. "I don't comprehend peace with them. It's us or them, Marna. If they don't come at us again, we'll go after them."

"When our reinforcements arrive, Simon." She looked at me. "Until then, you and I are the only realities."

"You're reality enough for me, Marna."

"And you for me."

We stopped talking, because we had something more important to do for the moment. When Marna took her face away from mine, she said, "You ought to shave. Simon, there will have to be a report of all this."

"When the others arrive, and I have time, I'll write one," I said.

Now that they're arriving, I have written it.

SEPTEMBER

Weird Tales

25¢



Even a ghost who died
by violence shouldn't lose
his legal rights, should he?

"Legal Rites" by Isaac Asimov & James MacCreigh

The Pineys

BY MANLY WADE WELLMAN



*"... I may not believe in them,
but I am afraid of them."*

AT THOSE words the three men in front of the country filling station fell quickly silent. Whether they were amused or shocked, I, for one, couldn't tell. I just leaned back in the rear seat of Mr. Beau Sawtelle's sedan, where nobody could see me. Mr. Beau Sawtelle drummed his fat knuckles on the steering wheel. He looked at his blonde niece Terry, then over

his heavy shoulder at me, and finally at the tallest and oldest of the men. Mr. Beau was thick and glumly alert, like a toad; like the car-driving toad in that Wind in the Willows story. For some reason Terry herself had mentioned the story and told a piece of it, right after they'd seen me up the highway with my thumb stuck out, and stopped to give me a lift. Not that Mr. Beau Saw-

tattle seemed the type to stop for a strange hitch-hiker, but maybe he couldn't help stopping for me.

"You sure you want to head for Piney's Grove, mister?" asked the tallest and oldest man.

"Piney's Grove, yes," repeated Mr. Beau gruffly. "Where the Pineys are supposed to live."

"Oh," said the tallest and oldest man. "You've heard about them."

"A little," said Mr. Beau, his toad-profile turned to me, "but not yet have I heard how I get there. If you please, friend."

The tallest and oldest man hooked his gaunt thumbs in the belt of his blue jeans and drummed his fingers on his hip bones. He squinted behind his glasses, and spit over one shoulder. "I myself never been down there. When I was just a chap, old folks used to tell tales about the place to keep us away from there."

"To make you stay away they must have told you where Piney's Grove was," said Mr. Beau.

"That's right, sir." The tallest and oldest man took one thumb out of his belt and pointed it down the road. "You have to go three-four miles. You curve around a quick bend, and you're not across Drowning Creek yet, but you see a sort of winding road going through the trees to your right. Them trees is thick and green a right much. From what I used to be told, you follow that road in to its end, and when you're at the end of it, why, you're at Piney's Grove."

"Thank you, friend," said Mr. Beau. "When we're settled in, you all come and visit us, hear?"

Another batch of silence, and it still hung over the men at the filling station as Mr. Beau shifted gears, started the car and drove us away.

We ourselves didn't speak for a while. Mr. Beau hunched his slack, heavy shoulders over his wheel. Terry fluffed back her cloud of hair, that was like pale yellow leaves of autumn with the sun on them. I half lay in the rear seat, an elbow on my pack. Finally Mr. Beau turned just enough so that his words blew back to me.

"Mac?" I'd told them they might call me Mac. "We're just about due to leave the

highway. Where would you like us to let you off?"

"Nowhere in particular," I replied. "I'm going nowhere." And that was as close to true as anything I'd told him and Terry since they picked me up.

"Just drifting?" he asked.

"Right now, I'm wondering if I mightn't ride on and see you come to this Piney's Grove; the place those men were so funny about."

Mr. Beau made a *grump* sound, the way a toad might try to chuckle. "If you really don't have a home or job, might you like to work for me a couple of days, Mac? You seem a nice young fellow, I like you and think I can trust you around."

Terry's shoulders tightened a bit, as if the suggestion worried her. She didn't turn her smooth, pretty face back to me, but I guessed it was frowning a little. "I'd be proud, Mr. Beau," I said. "Proud to help you."

"Then okay," he said.

WE DROVE along and found that quick bend we'd been told about. And just beyond, along the side of the highway, plodded toward us a straight, shabby old Negro. Mr. Beau put on the brakes and rolled to a stop and waited for the man to come up to us. He was a good-looking old brown-black fellow. He took off his shabby straw hat, the way mannerly Negroes do in North Carolina. "Good evenin', lady and gentlemen," he said gently. "How you today?"

"Uncle," said Mr. Beau, "you know how to direct us to Piney's Grove?"

The Negro's face turned blank, the way those faces at the filling station had turned. The dark lids hooded the eyes a little. Then a finger like a black billy club pointed. "That trail right there yonder, sir. You ain't fixin' to go there, is you?"

"Why not, Uncle?" asked Mr. Beau.

White-rimmed eyes were eloquent in the thunder-dark face. "Pineys might not like it, sir."

"You believe in the Pineys?" asked Terry, leaning across Mr. Beau.

The eyes hooded themselves again, 'courtously timid. "Most folks believes in the

Pineys, Miss. Even them that says don't believe, them scared."

Terry chuckled, not sounding shaky. "The Pineys must be horrible people."

"They horrible, all right," agreed the old Negro, as grave as a Chinese philosopher, "but they ain't peoples."

"Maybe they won't know we're coming," suggested Terry.

"They bound to know. They got a king, he out figurin' on you all, know you all's comin' to Piney's Grove."

"King, eh?" said Terry. "I never heard that."

"Thanks, Uncle," said Mr. Beau. He started the car again and drove to where the trail mouthed onto the highway as a creek onto a river. He turned us in and we went along. Glancing back, I saw the Negro gazing after us, like a dark statue.

Almost at once the trees made a tunnel, lacing their branches above us from side to side and shutting out the bright sun of late afternoon.

Often I've thought of the South as a place of extreme, almost frightening, contrasts. You travel along and come to a place like the one I'm talking about, where the light is shut out so you're almost benighted, and suddenly you'll whip out among the shadowing trees into a field of cotton, dazzling, blinding white. Only that wasn't what happened this time. We kept on under the tunnel of branches, while the trees clouded in closer and closer, and the track grew narrower, until it was barely wide enough for the car to pass. Under the tires lay thick, thick layers of brown pine straw, the droppings of seasons, and they muffled the noise of our travel.

Mr. Beau was remembering how the old man at the filling station had directed him to come to the end of the road and find Piney's Grove. This wasn't a road we travelled, but it came to an end. Mr. Beau stopped the car and got out. So did Terry. So did I. I flung my pack under one of the tall, straight longleaf pines that rose like pillars in a big church or auditorium or warehouse, and mixed their tufts of span-long needles overhead into a gloomy roof. Every pine trunk slanted a little southward, from having stood so long against the north

winds of mild Carolina winters. Underfoot lay the fallen pine straw, thick and soft and even as an expensive brown carpet. All around us grew the pines, out to where suddenly the grove was walled in by thick growth of brush and thorny creepers. It was like walking into a banquet hall after the crowd had gone. The poet Tom Moore, Terry told me she remembered, had written something like that in the last lines of a poem called *Oft in the Stilly Night*.

"Know why Piney's Grove is like this?" Mr. Beau asked Terry. "It's never been cultivated. Nobody ever held title to it. In the old days, when there were houses hereabouts, the colonists brought certain beliefs from Europe with them. A community used to set aside a tract and call it Devil's Croft—that's what you see here. It was supposed to belong to evil spirits, who'd stay there and leave the rest of the ground alone."

Terry shifted her feet on the carpet of needles, as if she wished she was somewhere else.

"Here we are," said Mr. Beau, "and here we stay." He looked up along one tall trunk, and along another. "What magnificent trees! As fine as I've ever seen." Then he gazed along the muffled ground. "Clean and level as a floor. No dead wood. It reminds me of what someone told me about an African jungle, where the white ants, the termites, had eaten up all the fallen dead branches and left things spick and span." He faced me. "Mac, you said you've been around here."

"In my time, yes," I said.

"Do you suppose termites—"

"No, sir, I doubt that the termites cleaned up this place," I said respectfully.

"Maybe the gnomes or the dwarfs did," offered Terry, smiling. Her smile was slight, but it managed to be radiant whenever she showed it.

"Or the Pineys," said Mr. Beau. "Since this was Devil's Croft, and they're devils of some sort, it was their responsibility to clean it up. Anyway, we camp here. This is the ideal spot." He tossed some bundles out of the luggage rack on top of the car. "Terry," he said, "drive back there to the crossroads and buy us some groceries."

Rapidly he scribbled out a list for her

and handed her some money. She slid under the wheel, started the car again, and backed and filled carefully around until she could head back the way we'd come. Mr. Beau unrolled a canvas pup tent and another, and I helped him pitch them side by side under the tall pines. He was active, for all his heavy body and short, crooked legs. "These trees are perfect for my purpose," he kept saying, as if I'd argued otherwise.

I knew what his purpose was. He was a government tree specialist, and hard at work on the problem of longleaf pine cultivation. The government sponsored it, big lumber companies approved it. You can't always get longleaf pine to grow where it isn't native, and it would mean plenty of lumber and money if it could be cultivated generally. Mr. Beau Sawtelle was going to camp here, in this specially informative spot, and pry into the longleaf business with the eye of a botanist and economist.

After the tents were up, he scuffed through the carpet of needles and scooped earth into a pan, for tests with his portable laboratory equipment. "Hope it stays clear tomorrow," he said, gazing upward. "Isn't it getting cloudy?"

"I think we're just pretty much in the shade," I told him.

"Help me gather wood, Mac," he directed. We had to go quite a way for some, because of that swept-floor aspect of Piney's Grove, but in among the brushy wall thickets we got two big man-loads and brought it back. Then Terry drove into sight. She'd fetched some paper bags full of food, and she'd fetched a pale, drawn face, too.

"Those men at the crossroads," she said. "They seem to be betting on whether we'll last out the night here."

She stared, I listened. And Mr. Beau gave his croaking toad-chuckle.

"Mac," he called to me, "why don't you run back up there and take some of that money they want to bet."

"No, thank you kindly," I said, "I'll just stay here."

"If I wasn't so busy with trees," Mr. Beau went on, "I'd make a study of country superstitions. Like the way Carolina folks plant by the full moon, and won't sit down thirteen at a time, and believe in those devouring Pineys! I'm surprised they know enough to lie down when they're tired."

"Well, I'm tired," said Terry, "and a little nervous. I know enough to relax." She sat down with her back against a pine trunk.

"You'll feel better when you've had some supper," smiled Mr. Beau. He bustled with a frying pan and a coffee pot while I built up the fire. It seemed cheerful as the gloom gathered. We made a good-humored meal together, and sat around the fire afterward. Terry smoked a cigarette, and Mr. Beau did the talking.

He told us all about pine trees. They're old, old inhabitants, said Mr. Beau. Back as far as Silurian times, he said, a good few million years, there were pines growing among the giant horsetails and tree ferns, with big crawfish and worms wriggling around their roots, getting ready to turn into fish or snakes.

"Were there any Pineys then?" asked

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Terry. She was still worrying over those bets among the men at the crossroads station.

Mr. Beau shook his head. "I haven't bothered with that Piney superstition, except to laugh at it. In any case, most of the Piney tales—about young lovers wandering among the pines and never coming back, things like that—don't come from around here. This Piney's Grove legend is told around here, but no catastrophes tied to it."

"Because people stayed away from Piney's Grove, perhaps," I suggested.

"Up to now," added Terry. "Mac, do you know about the Pineys?"

"A few things," I replied, and she gave me that strange, confused look of somebody who doesn't want to listen, but does.

"Folks will tell you," I continued, "that the Pineys live around the longleaf districts, and have lived there since the beginning of time—maybe all the way back to the Silurian age Mr. Beau mentioned. The pines are their home land, and they don't like pines to be destroyed or meddled with. They're shy and timid, except when they're on fighting terms."

"What did that old colored man say about their not being people?" reminded Terry.

"There's argument about whether they are or not. The earliest Indians used to say that the Pineys came before the Indians, and that the Pineys learned from the Indians to imitate the looks and ways of men. They're supposed to be rather smallish—say five feet tall, and slender—and they stand up on short legs and their arms are long and knobby. Some folks claim they wear clothes made of pine straw, some say their bodies are just shaggy, like a dog's. They have long heads with sharp faces, like a possum. And their hands have funny fingers. The third finger—what you call the ring finger—is longer than the middle one."

"Longer than the middle finger!" cried out Mr. Beau. "That's like the old Shonokin myths, about a race that wasn't human but had magic power and ruled America before the Indians."

"I've heard tell that the Indian word Shonokin means pine man," I said.

MR. BEAU had dug sand out from under the needles, and was using it to scrub out the frying pan. "This opens up an interesting speculation," he chattered. "You know that scientists think the old European legends about ogres and trolls date back to when the first real men, *homo sapiens*, met the coarse, hairy prehumans, *homo Neanderthalensis*, in western Europe during the Rough Stone Age. Prehuman remains might still turn up in America. Do you think maybe those stories about Shonokins and Pineys might indicate that there was some sort of Neanderthaler race in Stone-Age America?"

"I'm no scholar, I can't say," I said. "I'm just telling you the old tales. The Pineys aren't a dead race. They're still here—especially in the longleaf country, hiding nobody knows where. And folks say they're organized. They have a king."

"That colored man mentioned the king of the Pineys," said Terry, and she shuddered again. "He must be the worst of the lot."

I smiled to calm her. "On the contrary, he's supposed to be bigger than any of his subjects. Able to disguise himself by magic or something, so he can pass for a human being. And he goes out into the world to spot dangers to the Pineys, and to the pines where they live."

"You make them sound afraid of men," said Mr. Beau.

"I guess they are," I replied. "They're afraid of men, just the way rats are."

"Rats will fight if you corner them," said Terry. Her hand trembled as she lighted another cigarette. "And, look; long ago, the first settlers set aside this Piney's Grove for the Pineys."

"For the evil spirits," corrected Mr. Beau.

"Well, suppose the Pineys were satisfied as long as they had this little undisturbed hideaway," she argued. "And suppose, now that we've come here, right into their last stronghold—"

She did not finish.

Mr. Beau laughed, to hearten her as I thought. "You'll have nightmares if you don't cheer up. And it's bedtime. Terry and I have our pup tents, Mac, would you like to sleep in the car?"

"No, thanks," I said. "I'll just sleep outside. It's a fine night."

"Mac isn't afraid of the Pineys," said Mr. Beau to Terry. "He doesn't believe in them."

"Remember what the old colored man said," Terry half muttered. "I'm like that. I may not believe in them, but I'm afraid of them."

"I believe in them," I announced, and both Mr. Beau and Terry stared at me.

"Then why do you hang around?" asked Mr. Beau.

"Because I'm not afraid of them," I replied, and shoved more wood into the fire. It was dark, and seemed chilly for that time of year in North Carolina. Or maybe Terry's constant shivering made it seem chilly.

"Well," said Mr. Beau, "I'm going to turn in and sleep without any nightmares. Tomorrow I'll cut some pine specimens for study."

He got down uncouthly on all fours and crawled into his tent. Terry and I sat by the fire. After a few minutes, we could hear Mr. Beau snoring.

Terry rose and reached into the purse she wore slung on a strap over her shoulder. She got out an old envelope, full of something and doubled over. Opening it, she reached in. She moved away from the fire and past the tents. She began to circle our camp slowly, dipping into the envelope and strewing something, the way a sower drops a line of seeds.

"What are you up to?" I asked.

She stood still. "In this envelope," she said, "is a mixture of herbs and dust. There's the powder of John the Conqueror Root, and some aconite, and some ashes from burned papers with spells written on them."

"Sounds like a magic formula," I commented.

She went on pacing and strewing. She angled far out to get the car inside the circle she traced. Then she came back, and sat down, looking at me. She breathed deeply, as if she was somewhat relieved.

"It is a magic formula," she told me, with an air of confessing something. "There was an old woman I used to know,

who heard we were coming here and what for. She gave me that package of stuff, and told me to make a circle with it, the way you saw me do. Said it would make a charmed line that evil spirits couldn't cross. I took it just to please her, but tonight—" She broke off, and smiled rather ashamedly. "Well, after all the talk, I thought it wouldn't do any harm, anyway."

"It reminds me of what I've heard about the West," I replied. "Campers sleep in the rattlesnake country and lay a horsehair rope around them. The belief is, a rattlesnake won't crawl across it."

"I don't want any snake stories on top of Piney stories," said Terry.

"However," I added, "I remember seeing a photograph of a rattler crawling across a horsehair rope."

"Hush, Mac!" she begged, and I hushed. Terry sat against the trunk of a pine near her pup tent and drew her feet up under her skirt. I sat opposite her, against another trunk. She broke the silence at last.

"Maybe I was foolish to do what I did, Mac. I feel as if something is sneaking up on us, outside that circle. A whole lot of somethings, forming a ring."

"If they're outside your magic line, why bother?" I said. "You're camping in a strange place, and you're jumpy about the Piney stories."

"You say you believe in the Pineys," she remembered. "How can you believe in them? How can you explain them scientifically?"

"I'm no scientist, and science doesn't accept Pineys anyway," I replied. "So science doesn't try to explain them."

"But a race of creatures, dating back to before the Indians, like a race of gnomes or satyrs!" She sounded half-hysterical and lifter her shoulders almost to her ears to fight a shudder out of them.

"Take care you don't wake Mr. Beau," I cautioned her.

"Why doesn't anyone see the Pineys?"

"Probably they hide, unless they want to be seen. The army held maneuvers in these parts last spring, and not a single soldier reported seeing anything like a Piney."

"Do they live underground, Mac?"

"Maybe," I said.

"Or do they slip inside hollow trees, like dryads?"

"Maybe."

"Or just vanish into thin air when they want to? I know, Mac—you're about to say maybe. I wish I could get out of the notion that they're unvanishing themselves all around us."

"Why?" I asked. "Do you see anything that looks like a Piney?"

SHE shook her fair head vigorously. "No. I just—feel them near. A sense of hate and menace. But why should Pineys be hostile to us, supposing there were Pineys? We're not here to cut their trees, we're here to study longleaf pines and see how to make more of them grow."

"That's it," I said. "Grow more pines for the sake of the lumbering interests. The Pineys don't want that. If you grew a million more pines, but cut one, it would hurt the Pineys as though you cut their flesh. That's why they resent the plan."

She looked all around. "My reason says there can't be Pineys, but my blood keeps running cold. If I believed in them, like you, I might be less jumpy."

"Perhaps," I agreed.

"You think the Pineys know what we're up to here? Oh, yes, there's that king of the Pineys. He goes out among human beings, disguises himself as one of them and spies out what's happening. I could pick out a logical suspect for king of the Pineys, Mac."

"Now you're beginning to believe in them."

"Oh, it gets easy to believe in creepy stories, here in Piney's Grove at night. Maybe tomorrow I'll laugh at all this, but right now I've been figuring on who might be their king."

"Me, perhaps?" And I smiled.

Again she shook her head. "No, you're too normal." She leaned forward and whispered. "Uncle Beau."

I glanced toward his tent. I could hear him snoring.

"If that's your theory, you'd be pleading guilty to relationship—to Piney blood," I half-teased her.

"I'm not his real niece, Mac. I only call him Uncle Beau. You see, I've worked

with him so long, and I don't have any relatives of my own. But—suppose there were Pineys, and they had a king who went out in disguise. Well, just take a look at Uncle Beau. His grotesque froggy look, his strange ways, his insistence that the Pineys are only a ghost story."

"Doesn't he have an anti-Piney job?" I objected.

"That might be part of it. Maybe the king of the Pineys would get just the kind of job Uncle Beau has. He'd be a pine tree expert, so as to be next to all the plans of humanity as regarded pine trees. And he might plan to make a horrible example of his young girl assistant—yes, and a decent-seeming young hitch-hiker—by luring them into a trap."

Again she shuddered.

"How do you figure the Pineys destroy human beings that crowd them too close?" I inquired.

"I can only theorize. I imagine they strangle or smother them, and drag them off to some hidden den—maybe into some fourth dimension. What do they do with human victims?"

I smiled again, and shook my head. "Can't tell you. All people say is that the victims of the Pineys disappear and never show themselves again. But I'm interested in this notion of yours about Mr. Beau. Would it be worth his while, as king of the Pineys, to go to all that trouble getting his expert job, and then trap only two ordinary folks like you and me?"

"You see, he'd vanish, too," said Terry. "Go back to his Piney kingdom. The big pine tree expert would be mysteriously gone, and nobody—not even his girl assistant—would be left to take over in his place or report his findings. It would take some time for another expert to be trained. And it might be the Piney king again, in another disguise instead of the froggy form of Uncle Beau. Don't you agree that there's a lot of logic in the idea?"

"Yes," I conceded, "quite a lot."

Her smile was less nervous. "I'm feeling better. It's because I've been talking myself out, Mac. You're a big comfort, sitting there so calm and cheerful. I'm almost ready to crawl into my tent and go to sleep."

"I wouldn't just now, Miss Terry," I said.

HER eyes widened and she leaned forward into the firelight. "Stop that, Mac. Now you've got me imagining things again. I can almost see forms out there in the dark—shaggy forms, closing in—"

"You almost see them?" I interrupted. "Do you mean that?"

"I do see them!" she cried. "Stop scaring me. You've got me seeing things."

"But I see them, too," I said.

They were within the fringe of firelight.

A great uneven loop of them, knobby shoulder to knobby shoulder—a head shorter than the average man, standing up on scrawny, crooked legs, their bodies shaggy with what might be thick, coarse hair or a jacket of pine straw. And low skulls, sharp pointed brown ears, jutting possum noses, glowing eyes like tiny bits of coal.

The Pineys stood all around us.

Terry jumped up, glancing all around. "They've stopped closing in," she said, in a tight whisper. "The magic dust works. Look, Mac, they've come as close as they can without stepping over the circle. We're safe—"

I got up, too. "Safe from the ones outside," I corrected her.

The carpet of needles churned and heaved. Forms broke out of it, as if rising from under bed clothes. There was a

of his tent. That same moment the nearest Pineys had him, the way big shaggy ants might pile on top of a beetle. They had him silenced and helpless while you could count three.

And others were rising out of the needles, dropping out of the trees, filling the space around the fire inside the circle of dust Terry had strewn.

Terry ran toward me, the only protection she could hope for. I stood where I had risen, and flung both my hands high above my head.

"Stand still, all of you!" I shouted at the top of my voice. "Not one of you moves until I lower my hands!"

They froze where they were—the throng of them around us, the pile of them on top of Mr. Beau, the shoulder-to-shoulder ring of them outside the circle. Their noses pointed at me, their eyes glowed at me.

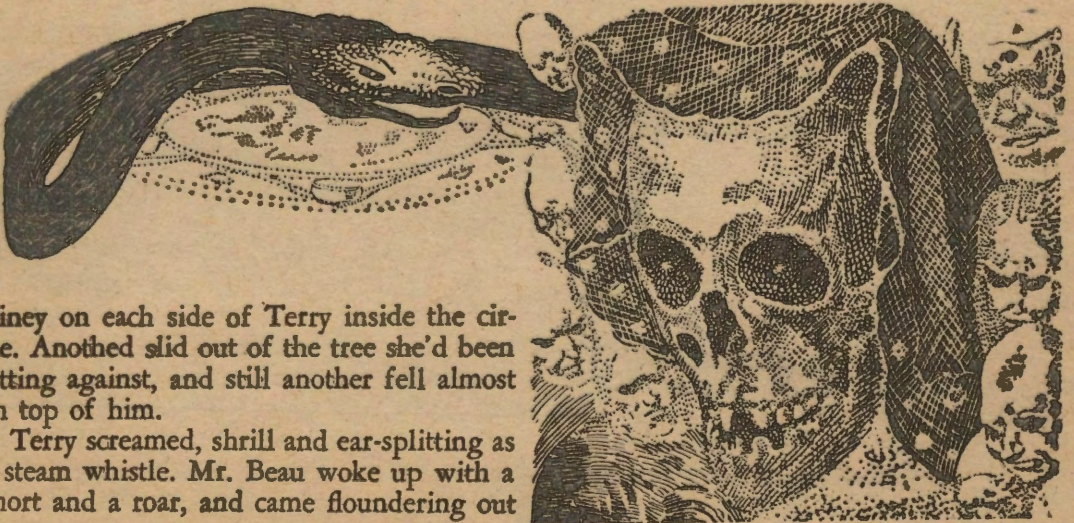
Terry caught me by the sleeve.

"Mac," she breathed, "you can save us from them. I know you can. You're stronger than all of them put together—even stronger than the king of the Pineys himself."

"You fool," I said to her.

I brought down my hands, that I'd lifted to make the Pineys stop for a moment. Thrusting them under Terry's nose, I showed her my fingers, the third fingers that were longer than the middle fingers.

"You fool," I said again. "I'm the king of the Pineys."



Piney on each side of Terry inside the circle. Another slid out of the tree she'd been sitting against, and still another fell almost on top of him.

Terry screamed, shrill and ear-splitting as a steam whistle. Mr. Beau woke up with a snort and a roar, and came floundering out

WEIRD Tales

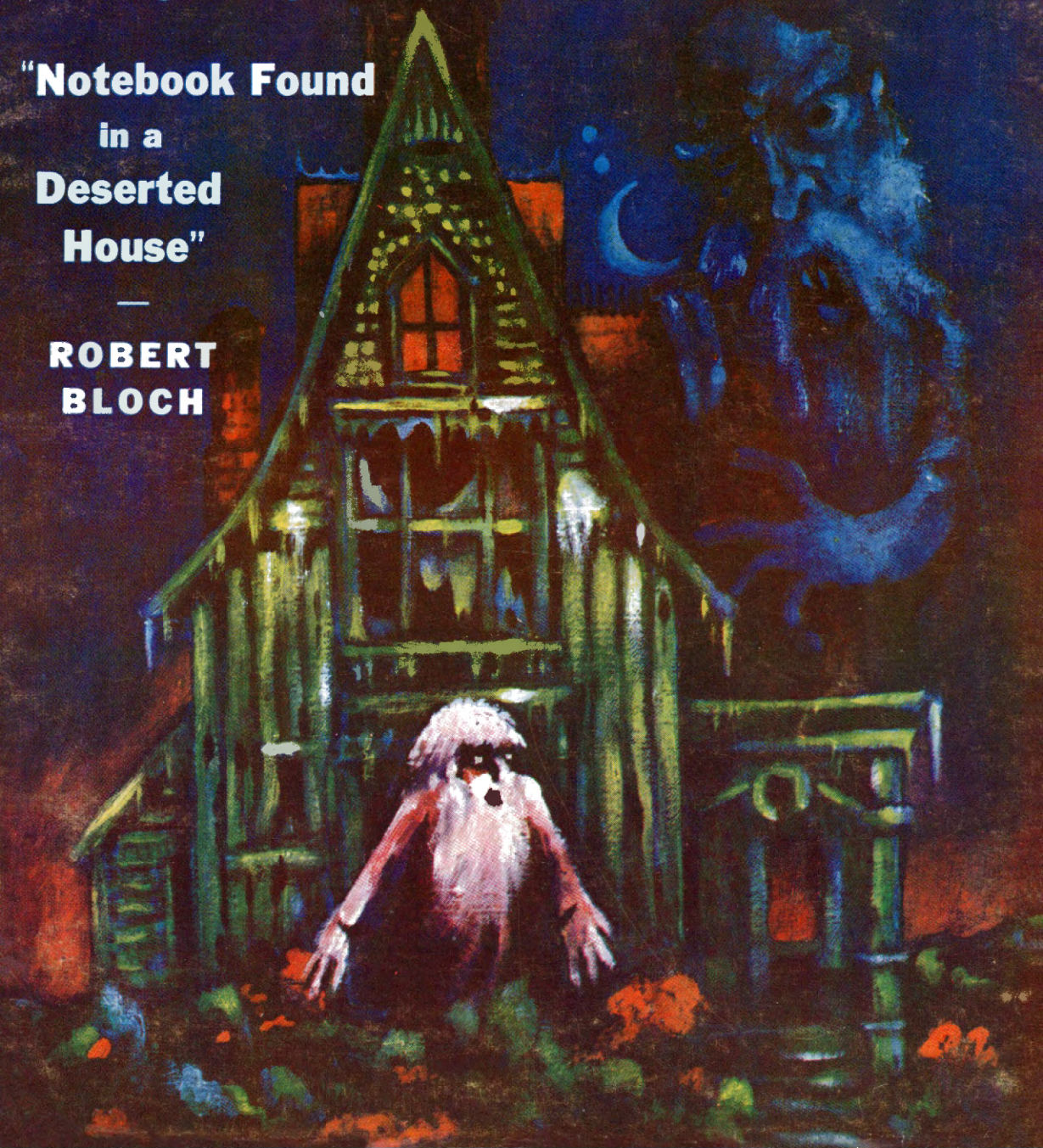
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**"Notebook Found
in a
Deserted
House"**

—
**ROBERT
BLOCH**





The Last Grave of Lill Warran

By Manly Wade Wellman

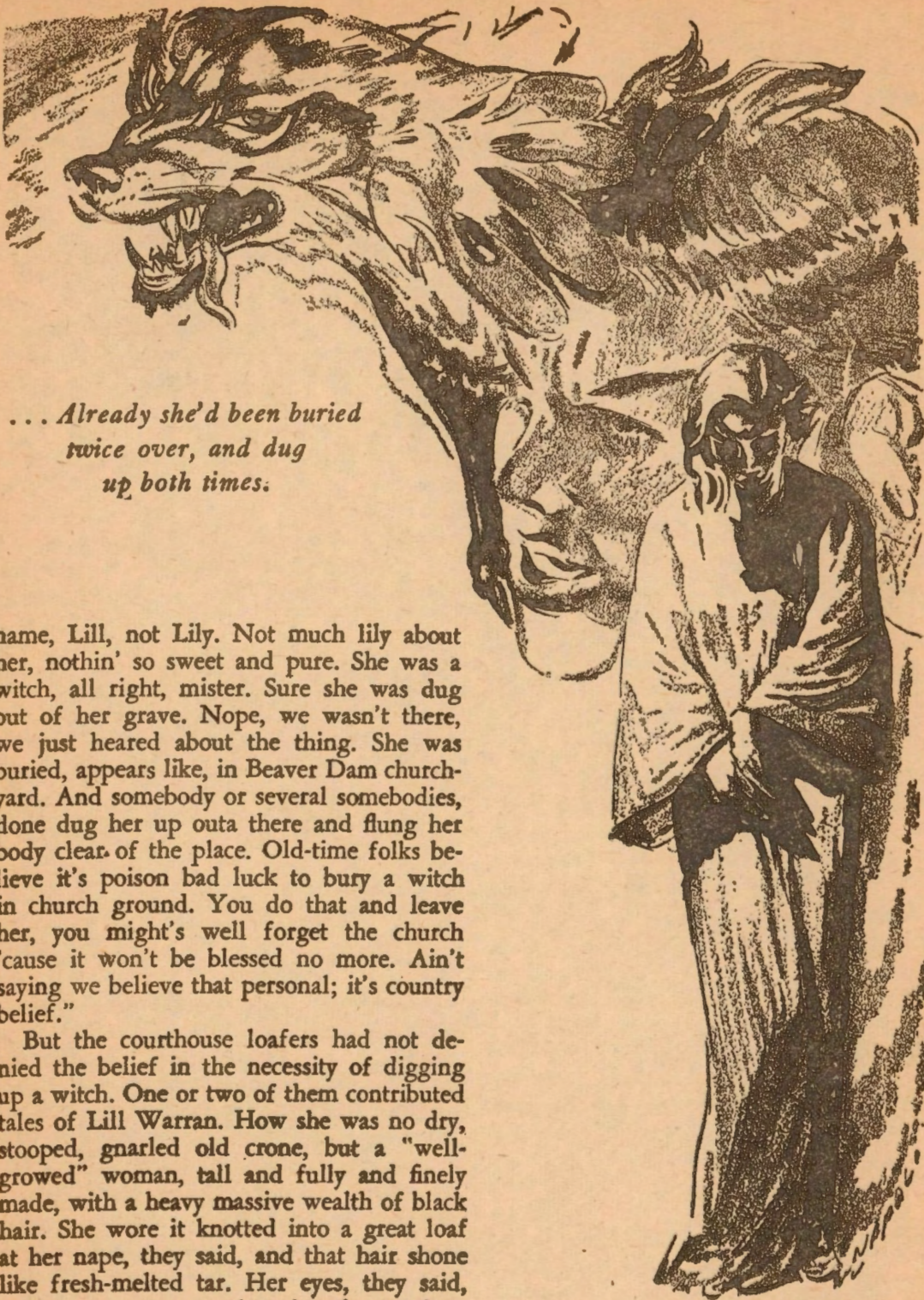
THE side road became a rutted track through the pines, and the track became a trail. John Thunstone reflected that he might have known his car would not be able to travel the full distance, and in any case a car seemed out of place in these ancient and uncombed woods. A lumber wagon would be more in keeping; or a riding mule, if John Thunstone were smaller and lighter, a fair load for a mule. He got out of the car, rolled up the windows, and locked the door. Ahead of him a path snaked through the thickets, narrow but well marked by the feet of nobody knew how many years of tramping.

He set his own big feet upon it. His giant body moved with silent grace. John

Thunstone was at home in woods, or in wilder places.

He had dressed roughly for this expedition. He had no intention of appearing before the Sandhill woods people as a tailored and foreign invader. So he wore corduroys, a leather jacket that had been cut for him from deer hides of his own shooting, and a shabby felt hat. His strong-boned, trim-mustached face was sober and watchful. It did not betray excitement, or any advance on the wonder he expected to feel when he finished his quest. In his big right hand he carried a walking stick of old dark wood.

"Yep, yep," the courthouse loafers at the town back on the paved road had answered his questions. "Lill Warran—that's her



*... Already she'd been buried
twice over, and dug
up both times.*

name, Lill, not Lily. Not much lily about her, nothin' so sweet and pure. She was a witch, all right, mister. Sure she was dug out of her grave. Nope, we wasn't there, we just heared about the thing. She was buried, appears like, in Beaver Dam churchyard. And somebody or several somebodies, done dug her up outa there and flung her body clear of the place. Old-time folks believe it's poison bad luck to bury a witch in church ground. You do that and leave her, you might's well forget the church 'cause it won't be blessed no more. Ain't saying we believe that personal; it's country belief."

But the courthouse loafers had not denied the belief in the necessity of digging up a witch. One or two of them contributed tales of Lill Warran. How she was no dry, stooped, gnarled old crone, but a "well-grown" woman, tall and fully and finely made, with a heavy massive wealth of black hair. She wore it knotted into a great loaf at her nape, they said, and that hair shone like fresh-melted tar. Her eyes, they said, were green as green glass, in a brown face, and her mouth—

"Huh!" they'd agreed to Thunstone. "You've come a far piece, and it's like you seen a many fine-looking women. But, mister, ain't no possible argument, you seen

Heading
by
Vincent
Napoli

Lill Warran and that red mouth she had on her, you'd slap a mortgage on your immortal soul to get a kiss of it."

And the inference was, more than one man had mortgaged his immortal soul for a kiss of Lill Warran's mouth. She was dead now. How? Bullet, some said. Accident, said others. But she was dead, and she'd been buried twice over, and dug up the both times.

Gathering this and other information, John Thunstone was on the trail of the end of the story. For it has been John Thunstone's study and career to follow such stories to their end. His story-searches have brought him into adventures of which only the tenth part has been told, and that tenth part the simplest and most believable. His experiences in most cases he has kept to himself. Those experiences have helped, perhaps, to sprinkle gray in his smooth black hair, to make somber his calm, strong face.

THE trail wound, and climbed. Here the wooded land sloped upward. And brush of a spiny species grew under the pines, encroaching so that John Thunstone had to force his way through, like a bull in a swamp. The spines plucked at his leather-clad arms and flanks, like little detaining fingers.

At the top of the slope was the clearing he sought.

It was a clearing in the strictest sense of the word. The tall pines had been axed away, undoubtedly their strong, straight trunks had gone to the building of the log house at the center. And cypress, from some swamp near by, had been split for the heavy shingles on the roof. All around the house was bare sand. Not a spear of grass, not a tuft of weed, grew there. It was as naked as a beach by the sea. Nobody moved in that naked yard, but from behind the house came a noise. *Plink, plink*, rhythmically. *Plink, plink*. Blows of metal on something solid, like stone or masonry.

Moving silently as an Indian, John Thunstone rounded the corner of the log house, paused to make sure of what was beyond, then moved toward it.

A man knelt there, of a height to match John Thunstone's own, but lean and spare, after the fashion of Sandhills brush dwellers. He wore a shabby checked shirt and blue dungaree pants, worn and frayed and washed out to the blue of a robin's egg. His sleeves were rolled to the biceps, showing gaunt, pallid arms with sharp elbows and knotty hands. His back was toward Thunstone. The crown of his tow head was beginning to be bald. Before him on the ground lay a flat rectangle of liver-colored stone. He held a short-handled, heavy-headed hammer in his right hand, and in his left a narrow-pointed wedge, such as is used to split sections of log into fire wood. The point of the wedge he held set against the face of the stone, and with the hammer he tapped the wedge butt. *Plink, plink*. He moved the point. *Plink*.

Still silent as a drifting cloud, Thunstone edged up behind him. He could see what the gaunt man was chiseling upon the stone. The last letter of a series of words, the letters irregular but deep and square:

HERE LIES

LILL WARRAN

TWICE BURIED AND TWICE DUG UP
BY FOOLS AND COWARDS
NOW SHE MAY
REST IN PEACE

SHE WAS A ROSE OF SHARON
A LILY OF THE VALLEY

John Thunstone bent to read the final word, and the bright afternoon sun threw his shadow upon the stone. Immediately the lean man was up and his whole body whipped erect and away on the other side of his work, swift and furtive as a weasel. He stood and stared at John Thunstone, the hammer lowered, the lean-pointed wedge lifted a trifle.

"Who you?" the gaunt man wheezed breathily. He had a sharp face, a nose that projected like a pointed beak, with forehead and chin sloping back from it above and below. His eyes were dark, beady, and close-set. His face was yellow and leathery, and

even the whites of the eyes looked clouded, as with biliousness.

"My name is John Thunstone," Thunstone made reply, as casually as possible. "I'm looking for Mr. Parrell."

"That's me. Pos Parrell."

Pos . . . It was plain to see where the name suited the man. That lean, pointed snout, the meager chin and brow, the sharp eyes, looked like those of an opossum. A suspicious, angry, dangerous opossum.

"What can I do for you?" demanded Pos Parrell. He sounded as if he would like to do something violent.

"I want to ask about Miss Lill Warran," said Thunstone, still quietly, soothingly, as he might speak to a restive dog or horse. "I see you're making a gravestone for her." He pointed with his stick.

"And why not?" snapped Pos Parrell. His thin lips drew back from lean, strong teeth, like stained fangs. "Ain't she to be allowed to rest peacefully in her grave some time?"

"I hope she will," said Thunstone. "I heard at the county seat about how she'd been dragged out of her grave at the churchyard."

Pos Parrell snorted. His hands tightened on hammer and wedge. "Now, mister, what almighty pick is it of yours? Listen, are you the law? If you are, you just trot your law back to the county seat. I'm not studying to hear any law. They won't let her stay buried at Beaver Dam, I've buried her here, and here she'll stay."

"No," Thunstone assured him. "I'm not the law."

"Then what are you? One of them reporters from the newspapers? Whatever you are, get off my place."

"Not until we've talked a bit, Mr. Parrell."

"I'll put you off. I got a right to put you off my place."

Thunstone smiled his most charming. "You do have the right. But could you put me off?"

Pos Parrell raked him with the beady eyes. "You about twice as big as me, but—"

He dropped the hammer. It struck the sand with a grim thud. He whipped the

lean wedge over to his right hand, holding it daggerwise.

"Don't try that," warned Thunstone, and his walking stick lifted in his own hand.

Pos Parrell took a stamping stride forward. His left hand clutched at the tip of Thunstone's stick, the wedge lifted in his right.

But Thunstone drew back on the stick's handle. There was a metallic whisper. The lower part of the stick, clamped in Parrell's grasp, stripped away like the sheath of a sword, revealing a long, straight skewer of gleaming blade that set in the handle as in a heft. As Parrell drove forward with his wedge, Thunstone delicately flicked the point of his sword cane across the back of Parrell's fist. Parrell squeaked with pain, and the wedge fell beside the hammer. Next instant Parrell was backing away hurriedly. Thunstone moved lightly, calmly after him, the sword point quivering inches from Parrell's throat.

"Hey!" protested Parrell. "Hey!"

"I'm sorry, but you'll have to listen to me."

"Put that thing down. I quit!"

Thunstone lowered the point, and smiled.

"Let's both quit. Let's talk."

PARRELL subsided. He still held the hollow lower length of the stick. Thunstone took it from him and sheathed his blade.

"You know what?" said Parrell, rather wearily. "That's about the curiourest place I ever seen a man carry a stab weapon."

"It's a sword cane," explained Thunstone, friendly again. "It was made hundreds of years ago. The man who gave it to me said it was made by Saint Dunstan."

"Who was that?"

"He was an Englishman."

"Foreigner, huh?"

"Saint Dunstan was a silversmith," Thunstone told Parrell. "This blade in my stick is made out of silver. Among other things, Saint Dunstan is said to have twisted the devil's nose."

"Lemme see that thing again," Parrell said, and again Thunstone cleared the

blade. "Huh!" grunted Parrell. "It got words on it. I can't make 'em out."

Thunstone's big finger tapped the engraved lettering. "*Sic pereant omnes inimici tui, Domine,*" He read aloud. "That means, 'So perish all thine enemies, O God.'"

"Bible words or charm words?"

"Perhaps both," said Thunstone. "Now, Parrell, I want to be your friend. The people in town are pretty rough in their talk about you."

"And about Lill," said Parrell, so faintly that Thunstone could hardly hear. "But I loved her. Lots of men has loved her, but I reckon I was the only one loving her when she died."

"Tell me," urged Thunstone.

Parrell tramped back toward the cabin, and Thunstone followed. Parrell sat on the door sill and scuffed the dirt with his coarse shoes. He studied the back of his right hand, where Thunstone's skilful flick of the silver blade had raised a thin wale and shed a drop of blood.

"You know, you could have hurt me worse if you'd had a mind," he said.

"I didn't have a mind," Thunstone told him.

Again the shoes scuffed the sand. "I prized up my door stoop stone to make that marker for Lill's grave."

"It's a good one."

Parrell gestured to the edge of the clearing. There, in the shade of the pines, showed a mound of sand, dark with fresh digging, the size and shape of a body.

"I buried her there," he said, "and there she'll stay. At the last end, I reckon, she knowed I loved her and nothing could change it."

A rose of Sharon, a lily of the valley. Lill Warran had been no sweet lily, the court house loafers had insisted. Thunstone squatted on his heels.

"You know," he said, "you'll feel better if you talk about it to somebody who will listen."

"Reckon I will."

And Pos Parrell talked.

Later Thunstone wrote down Parrell's story from memory, as a most interesting record of belief in the supernatural, and

also belief in a most beautiful and wilful woman.

LILL WARRAN was called a witch because her mother had been one, and her grandmother had been one. Folks said she could curse pigs thin, and curse hens out of laying, and make trees fall on men cutting them. They wouldn't hear of things like that happening by chance. The preacher at Beaver Dam had sworn she said the Lord's Prayer wrong—"Our Father, who *wert* in heaven." Which meant Satan, who'd fallen from the Pearly Gates, the way it says in the book of Isaiah. No, the preacher hadn't read Lill Warran out of church, but she stopped coming, and laughed at the people who mumbled. The old folks hated her, the children were afraid, and the women suspicious. But the men!

"She could get any man," said Parrell. "She got practically all of them. A hunter would leave his gun, a drinker would leave his bottle of stump-hole whiskey, a farmer would leave his plough standing in the field. There was a many wives crying tears because their husbands were out at night, following after Lill Warran. And Nobe Filder hanged himself, everybody knows, because he was to meet Lill and she didn't come, but went that night to a square dance with Newton Henley. And Newton grew to hate her, but he took sick and when he was dying he called on her name."

Pos Parrell had just loved her. She never promised to meet him, she tossed him smiles and chance words, like so many table scraps to a dog. Maybe it was as well. Those who were lovers of Lill Warran worshipped her, then feared and hated her.

That, at least, was witch history as Thunstone had read it and researched it. The old books of the old scholars were full of evidence about such seductive enchantresses, all the way back to the goddesses of dark love—Ishtar, Ashtoreth, Astarte, various names for the same force, terrible in love as the God-of War is terrible in battle. To Thunstone's mind came a fragment of the Epic of Gilgamesh, lettered on a Chaldean tablet of clay five millennia ago. Gilgamesh had taunted Ishtar's overtures:

Thou fellest in love with the herdsman
 Who ever scattered grain for thee,
 And daily slaughtered a kid for thee;
 Thou smotest him,
 Turned him into a wolf. . . .

"It didn't prove nothing," Parrell was protesting. "Only that she was easy to fall in love with and hard to keep."

"What did she live on?" asked Thunstone. "Did her family have anything?"

"Shucks, no. She was orphaned. She lived by herself—they've burned the cabin now. People said she knew spells, so she could witch meat out of smokehouse into her pot, witch meal out of pantries onto her table."

"I've heard of people suspecting that of witches," nodded Thunstone, careful to keep his manner sympathetic. "It's an easy story to make yourself believe."

"I never believed it, not even when—"

Parrell told the climax of the sorry, eerie tale. It had happened a week ago. It had to do with a silver bullet.

FOR silver bullets are sure death to demons, and this was known to a young man by the name of Taylor Howatt, the latest to flutter around the fascinating flame that was Lill Warran. His friends warned him about her, and he wouldn't listen. Not Taylor! Not until there was prowling around his cabin by something that whined and yelped like a beast-varmint—a wolf, the old folks would say, except that wolves hadn't been seen in those parts since the old frontier days. And Taylor Howatt had glimpsed the thing once or twice by moonlight. It was shaggy, it had pointy ears and a pointy muzzle, but it stood up on its two legs, part of the time at least.

"The werewolf story," commented Thunstone, but Parrell continued.

Taylor Howatt knew what to do. He had an old, old deer rifle, the kind made by country gunsmiths as long back as the War with the North. He had the bullet mould, too, and he'd melted down half a silver dollar and cast him a bullet. He'd loaded the deer rifle ready, and listened for several nights to the howls. When the thing came peeking close to an open window, he caught

its shape square against the rising moon and fired.

Next day, Lill Warran was found dead on the foot path leading to her own home, and her heart was shot through.

Of course, there'd been a sheriff deputy down. Taylor Howatt was able to claim it was accidental. The people had gathered at Lill's cabin, and there they'd found stuff, they said. One claimed a side of bacon he said had hung in his smoke house. And another found a book.

"Book?" said John Thunstone quickly. For books are generally interesting properties in stories like the story of Lill Warran.

"I've been told about it by three folks who swore they seen it," replied Parrell. "Me myself, I didn't see it, so I hold I ain't called on to judge of it."

"What did those three people tell you about it?"

"Well—it was hairy like. The cover all hairy and dark, like the skin of a black bear. And inside it had three parts."

"The first part," said Thunstone, "was written with red ink on white paper. The second part, with black ink on red paper. And the third, black paper, written on with—"

"You been talking to them other folks!" accused Parrell, half starting up.

"No. Though I heard the book mentioned at the court house. It's just that I've heard of such books before. The third part of the book, black paper, is written on with white ink that will shine in the dark, so that it can be read without light."

"Then them folks mocking me heard what you heard about the like of the book. They made it up to vex my soul."

"Maybe," agreed Thunstone, though he doubted that the people of the Sandhills brush would have so much knowledge of classical and rare grimoires. "Go on."

The way Parrell had heard the book explained, the first part—red ink on white paper—was made up of rather simple charms, to cure rheumatism or sore eyes, with one or two more interesting spells that concerned the winning of love or the causing of a wearisome lover to depart. The second, the black ink on red, had the

charm to bring food from the stores of neighbors, as well as something that purported to make the practitioner invisible, and something else that aided in the construction of a mirror in which one could see far away scenes and actions.

"And the black part of the book?" asked Thunstone, more calmly than he felt.

"Nobody got that far."

"Good," said Thunstone thankfully. He himself would have thought twice, and more than twice, before reading the shiny letters in the black third section of such a book.

"The preacher took it. Said he locked it in his desk. Next day it was gone. Folks think it went back to Satan himself."

Folks might not be far wrong, thought Thunstone, but did not say as much aloud.

PARRELL'S voice was wretched as he finished his narrative. Lill Warran had had no kinsmen, none who would claim her body at least. So he, Parrell, had claimed it—bought a coffin and paid for a plot in Beaver Dam churchyard. He and an undertaker's helper had been alone at the burying of Lill Warran.

"Since nobody wanted to be Christian, nothing was said from the Bible at the burying," Parrell told Thunstone. "I did say a little verse of a song I remembered, I always remembered, when I thought of her. This is what it was."

He half-crooned the rhyme:

"The raven crow is a coal, coal black,
The jay is a purple blue,
If ever I forget my own fair love,
Let my heart melt away like dew."

Thunstone wondered how old the song was. "Then?" he prompted.

"You know the rest. The morning after, they tore her up out of the grave and flung her in my yard. I found her lying near to my doorstep, the one I just now cut for her gravestone." Parrell nodded toward where it lay. "I took her and buried her again. And this morning it was the same. There she lay. So let them all go curse. I buried her yonder, and yonder she'll stay,

or if anybody says different I'll argue with something more than a law book. Did I do wrong, mister?"

"Not you," said Thunstone. "You did what your heart told you."

"Thanks. Thank you kindly. Like you said, I do feel better for talking it over." Parrell rose. "I'm going to set up that stone."

Thunstone helped him. The weight of the slab taxed their strength. Parrell drove it into the sand at the head of the grave. Then he looked to where the sun was sinking behind the pines.

"You won't be getting back away from here before it's dark and hard to pick the way. I'll be honored if you stopped here tonight. Not much of a bed or supper doings, but if you'll so be kind—"

"Thank you," said Thunstone, who had been wondering how to manage an overnight stay.

They entered the front room of the little cabin. Inside it was finished in boards, rough sawn but evenly fitted into place. There was an old table, old chairs, a very old cook stove, pans hanging to nails on the walls. Parrell beckoned Thunstone to where a picture was tacked to a wall.

"It's her," he said.

The photograph was cheap, and some slipshod studio artist had touched it up with colors. But Thunstone could see what sort of woman Lill Warran had been. The picture was half length, and she wore a snug dress with large flower figuring. She smiled into the camera, with the wide full mouth of which he had heard. Her eyes were slanting, mocking, and lustrous. Her head was proud on fine shoulders. Round and deep was the bosom into which a silver bullet had been sent by the old deer rifle of Taylor Howatt.

"You see why I loved her," said Parrell.

"I see," Thunstone assured him.

PARRELL cooked for them. There was corn bread and syrup, and a plate of rib meat, hearty fare. Despite his sorrow, Parrell ate well of his own cooking. When the meal was finished, Parrell bowed and mumbled an old country blessing. They

went out into the yard. Parrell walked slowly to the grave of Lill Warran and gazed down at it. Thunstone moved in among the trees, saw something that grew, and stooped to gouge it out.

"What you gathering?" called Parrell.

"Just an odd little growth," Thunstone called back, and pulled another. They were the roots called throughout the south by the name of John the Conqueror, great specifics against enchantment. Thunstone filled his pockets with them, and walked back to join Parrell.

"I'm glad you came along, Mr. Thunstone," said Parrell. His opossum face was touched with a shy smile. "I've lived alone for years, but never so lonely as the last week."

Together they entered the house. Parrell found and lighted an oil lamp, and immediately Thunstone felt the impact of eyes from across the room. Swiftly facing that way, he gazed into the face of the portrait of Lill Warran. The pictured smile seemed to taunt and defy him, and to invite him as well. What had the man leered at the court house? *You'd slap a mortgage on your immortal soul to get a kiss.* That picture was enough to convince Thunstone that better men than pitiful, spindling Pos Parrell could find Lill Warran herself irresistible.

"I'll make you up a pallet bed here," offered Parrell.

"You needn't bother for me," Thunstone said, but Parrell opened a battered old wooden chest and brought out a quilt, another. As he spread them out, Thunstone recognized the ancient and famous patterns of the quilt work. Kentucky Blazing Star, that was one of them. Another was True Love Fancy.

"My old mamma made them," Parrell informed him.

Parrell folded the quilts into a pallet along the wall. "Sure you'll be all right? You won't prefer to take my bed."

"I've slept a lot harder than what you're fixing for me," Thunstone quickly assured him.

They sat at a table and talked. Parrell's thoughts were still for his lost love. He

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spoke of her, earnestly, revealingly. Once or twice Thunstone suspected him of trying for poetic speech.

"I would look at her," said Parrell, "and it was like hearing, not seeing."

"Hearing what?"

"Hearing—well, more than anything else it was like the sound of a fiddle, played prettier than you ever heard. Prettier than I can ever play."

Thunstone had seen the battered fiddle-case on a hand-hewn shelf beside the door of the rear room which was apparently Parrell's sleeping quarters, but he had not mentioned it. "Suppose you play us something now," he suggested.

Parrell swallowed. "Play music? With her lying out there in her grave?"

"She wouldn't object, if she knew. Playing the fiddle gives you pleasure, doesn't it?"

Parrell seemed to need no more bidding. He rose, opened the case, and brought out the fiddle. It was old and dark, and he tuned it with fingers diffidently skilful. Thunstone looked at him. "Where did you get it? The fiddle, I mean."

"Oh, my granddaddy inherited it to me. I was the onliest grandboy he had cared to learn."

"Where did he get it?"

"I don't rightly know how to tell you that. I always heard a foreigner fellow—I mean a sure-enough foreigner from Europe or some place, not just somebody from some other part of the country—gave it to my granddaddy, or either traded it to him."

Thunstone knew something about violins, and judged that this one was worth a sum that would surprise Parrell, if no more than mentioned. Thunstone did not mention any sum. He only said, "Play something, why not?"

Parrell grinned, showing his lean teeth. He tucked the instrument against his jowl and played. He was erratic but vigorous; with training, he might have been brilliant. The music soared, wailed, thundered, and died down. "That was interesting," said Thunstone. "What was it?"

"Just something I sort of figured out for myself," said Parrell apologetically. "I do

that once in a while, but not lots. Folks would rather hear the old songs—things they know, like Arkansaw Traveller and Fire In the Mountains. I generally play my own stuff to myself, alone here in the evenings." Parrell laid down the instrument. "My fiddle's kept me company, sometimes at night when I wished Lill was with me."

"Did you ever know," said Thunstone, "why we have so many fiddles in the American country localities?"

"Never heard that I recollect."

"In the beginnings of America," Thunstone told him, "frontier homes were lonely and there were wild beasts around. Wolves, mostly."

"Not now," put in Parrell. "Remember that crazy yarn Taylor Howatt told about shooting at a wolf, and there hasn't been a wolf around here since I don't know when."

"Maybe not now, but there were wolves in the old days. And the strains of fiddle music hurt the ears of the wolves and kept them away."

"There may be a lot in what you say," nodded Parrell, and put his instrument back into its box. "Listen, I'm tired. I've not slept fit for a dog these past six nights. But now, with you here, talking sense like you have—" Parrell paused, stretched and yawned. "If it's all right with you, I'll go sleep a while."

"Good night, Parrell," said Thunstone, and watched his host go into the rear room and close the door.

THEN Thunstone went outside. It was quiet and starry, and the moon rose, half of its disk gleaming pale. He took from his pockets the roots of John the Conqueror, placing one on the sill above the door, another above the front window, and so on around the shanty. Returning, he entered the front room again, turned up the lamp a trifle, and spread out a piece of paper. He produced a pen and began to write:

My Dear de Grandin:

I know your own investigations kept you from coming here with me, but I wonder if this thing isn't more interest-

ing, if not more important, than what you chose to stay and do in New Jersey.

The rumors about Lill Warran, as outlined to you in the letter I wrote this morning, are mostly confirmed. Here, however, are the new items I've uncovered:

Strong evidence of the worst type of grimoire. I refer to one with white, red and black sections. Since it's mentioned in this case, I incline to believe there was one—these country folk could hardly make up such a grimoire out of their heads. Lill Warran, it seems, had a copy, which later vanished from a locked drawer. Naturally! Or, super-naturally!

Presence of a werewolf. One Taylor Howatt was sure enough to make himself a silver bullet, and to use it effectively. He fired at a hairy, point-eared monster, and it was Lill Warran they picked up dead. This item naturally suggests the next.

Nobody knows the person or persons who turned Lill Warran twice out of her grave. Most people of the region are rather smugly pleased at the report that Lill Warran wasn't allowed rest in consecrated churchyard soil, and Pos Parrell, grief-stricken, has buried her in his yard, where he intends that she will have peace. But, de Grandin, you will already

have guessed the truth they have failed even to imagine: if Lill Warran was indeed a werewolf—and the black section of the grimoire undoubtedly told her how to be one at will—if, I say, Lill Warran was a werewolf . . .

Thunstone sat up in the chair, the pen in his fingers. Somebody, or something, moved stealthily in the darkness outside.

There was a tapping whisper at the screen Pos Parrell had nailed over the window. Thunstone grimly forebore to glance. He made himself yawn, a broad hand covering his mouth—the reflex gesture, he meditated as he yawned, born of generations past who feared lest the soul might be snatched through the open mouth by a demon. Slowly he capped his pen, and laid it upon the unfinished letter to de Grandin. He rose, stretched, and tossed aside his leather jacket. He stopped and pretended to untie his shoes, but did not take them off. Finally, cupping his palm around the top of the lamp chimney, he blew out the light. He moved to where Parrell had spread the pallet of quilts and lay down upon them. He began to breathe deeply and regularly. One hand, relaxed in its seeming, rested within an inch of the sword cane.

The climax of the adventure was upon him, he knew very well; but in the moments



to follow he must possess himself with calm, must appear to be asleep in a manner to deceive the most skeptical observer.

Thus determined, he resolutely relaxed, from the toe-joints up. He let his big jaw go slack, his big hands curl open. He continued to breathe deeply and regularly, like a sleeper. Hardest of all was the task of conquering the swift race of heart and pulse, but John Thunstone had learned how to do that, too, because of necessity many times before. So completely did he contrive to pretend slumber that his mind went dreamy and vague around the edges. He seemed to float a little free of the pallet, to feel awareness at not too great a distance of the gates of dreamland.

But his ears were tuned to search out sounds. And outside in the dark the unknown creature continued its stealthy round.

It paused—just in front of the door, as John Thunstone judged. It knew that the root of John the Conqueror lay there, an obstacle; but not an obstacle that completely baffled. Such an herb, to turn back what Thunstone felt sure was besieging the dark cabin, would need to be wolfbane or garlic: or, for what grew naturally in these parts of the world, French lilac. John the Conqueror—Big John or Little John, as woodland gatherers defined the two varieties—was only "used to win," and might not assure victory. All it could do, certainly, was slow up the advance of the besieger.

Under his breath, very soft and very low, John Thunstone began to mutter a saying taught him by a white magician in a far-away city, half a prayer and half a spell against evil enemies:

"Two wicked eyes have overshadowed us, but two holy eyes are fixed upon us; the eyes of Saint Dunstan, who smote and shamed the devil. Beware, wicked one; beware twice, wicked one; beware thrice . . ."

In the next room, Thunstone could hear sounds. They were sounds as of dull, careful pecking. They came from the direction in which, as he had seen, was set the closed casement window of Pos Parrell's sleeping chamber.

With the utter silence he knew how to keep, Thunstone rolled from his

pallet, lying for a moment face down on the floor. He drew up one knee and both hands, and rose to his full height. In one hand he brought along the sword cane.

The pecking sound persisted as he slid one foot along the rough planks of the floor, praying that no creak would sound. He managed a step, another, a third. He was at the door leading to the next room.

His free hand groped for a knob. There was none, only a latch string. Thunstone pulled, and the door sagged silently open.

He looked into a room, the dimness of which was washed by light from the moon outside. In the window, silhouetted against the four panes, showed the outline of head and shoulders. A tinkling whisper, and one of the panes fell inward, to shatter musically on the boards below. Something had picked away the putty. A dark arm crept in, weaving like a snake, to fumble at the catch. A moment later the window was open, and something thrust itself in, made the passage and landed on the floor.

The moonlight gave him a better look at the shape as it rose from all fours and faced toward the cot where Pos Parrell lay, silent and slack as though he were drugged.

John Thunstone knew that face from the picture in the room where he had slept. It had the slanted, lustrous eyes, the cloud of hair—not clubbed, but hanging in a great thunder cloud on either side of the face. And the wide, full mouth did not smile, but quivered as by some overwhelming pulse.

"Pos," whispered the mouth of Lill War-ran.

She wore a white robelike garment, such as is put on dead women in that country. Its wide, winglike sleeves swaddled her arms, but it fell free of the smooth, pale shoulders, the fine upper slope of the bosom. Now as in life, Lill Warran was a forbiddingly beautiful creature. She seemed to sway, to float toward Parrell.

"You love me," she breathed at him.

The sleeper stirred for the first time. He turned toward her, a hand moved sleepily, almost as though it beckoned her. Lill Warran winnowed to the very bedside.

"Stop where you are!" called John Thun-

stone, and strode into the room, and toward the bed.

She paused, a hand on the blanket that covered Parrell. Her face turned toward Thunstone, the moonlight playing upon it. Her mocking smile possessed her lips.

"You were wise enough to guess most of me," she said. "Are you going to be fool enough to try to stop what is bound to happen?"

"You won't touch him," said Thunstone.

She chuckled. "Don't be afraid to shout. You cannot waken Pos Parrell tonight—not while I stand here. He loves me. He always loved me. The others loved and then hated. But he loves—though he thinks I am dead—"

She sounded archaic, she sounded measured and stilted, as though she quoted ill-rehearsed lines from some old play. That was in order, Thunstone knew.

"He loves you, that's certain," agreed Thunstone. "That means you recognize his helplessness. You think that his love makes him your easy prey. You didn't reckon with me."

"Who are you?"

"My name is John Thunstone."

Lill Warran glared, her lips writhed back. She seemed as though she would spit.

"I've heard that name. John Thunstone! Shall I not dispose of you, right now and at once, you fool?"

SHE took a step away from the bed. Her hands lifted, the winglike sleeves slipped back from them. She crooked her fingers, talon fashion, and Thunstone saw the length and sharpness of her nails.

Lill Warran laughed.

"Fools have their own reward. Destruction!"

Thunstone stood with feet apart. The cane lay across his body, its handle in his right fist, the fingers of his left hand clasping around the lower shank that made a sheath.

"You have a stick," said Lill Warran.

"Do you think you can beat me away, like a dog?"

"I do."

"You cannot even move, John Thunstone!" Her hands weaved in the air, like

the hands of a hypnotist. "You're a toy for me! I remember hearing a poem once: 'A fool there was—'" She paused, laughing.

"Remember the title of that poem?" he said, almost sweetly, and she screamed, like the largest and loudest of bats, and leaped.

In that instant, Thunstone cleared the long silver rapier from its hiding, and, as swiftly as she, extended his arm like a fencer in riposte.

Upon the needle-pointed blade, Lill Warran skewered herself. He felt the point slip easily, smoothly, into the flesh of her bosom. It grated on a bone somewhere, then slid past and through. Lill Warran's body slammed to the very hilt, and for a moment she was no more than arm's length from him. Her eyes grew round, her mouth opened wide, but only a whisper of breath came from it.

Then she fell backward, slack as an empty garment, and as Thunstone cleared his blade she thudded on the floor and lay with her arms flung out to right and left, as though crucified.

From his hip pocket Thunstone fished a handkerchief and wiped away the blood that ran from point to base of the silver weapon forged centuries before by Saint Dunstan, patron of those who face and fight creatures of evil.

To his lips came the prayer engraved upon the blade, and he repeated it aloud: "*Sic pereant omnes inimici tui, Domine. . . .* So perish all thine enemies, O God."

"Huh?" sleepily said Pos Parrell, and sat up on his cot. He strained his eyes in the dimness. "What you say, Mister? What's happened?"

Thunstone moved toward the bureau, sheathing his silver blade. He struck a match, lifted the chimney from the lamp on the bureau, and lighted it. The room filled with the warm glow from the wick.

Parrell sprang out of bed. "Hey, look. The window's open—it's broke in one pane. Who done that?"

"Somebody from outside," said Thunstone, standing still to watch.

Parrell turned and stared at what was on the floor. "It's Lill!" he bawled in a quivering voice. "Sink their rotten souls to hell,

they come dug her up again and throwed her in here!"

"I don't think so," said Thunstone, and lifted the lamp. "Take a good look."

Moving, he shed light down upon the quiet form of Lill Warran. Parrell knelt beside her, his trembling hands touching the dark stain on her bosom.

"Blood!" he gulped. "That's fresh blood. Her wound was bleeding, right now. She wasn't dead down there in the grave!"

"No," agreed Thunstone quietly. "She wasn't dead down there in the grave. But she's dead now."

Parrell examined her carefully, miserably. "Yes, sir. She's dead now. She won't rise up no more."

"No more," agreed Thunstone again. "And she got out of her grave by her own strength. Nobody dug her up, dead or alive."

Parrell stared from where he knelt. Wonder and puzzlement touched his grief-lined, sharp-snouted face.

"Come out and see," invited Thunstone, and lifted the lamp from where it stood on the bureau. He walked through the front room and out of the door. Parrell tramped at his heels.

The night was quiet, with so little breeze that the flame of the lamp barely flickered. Straight to the graveside Thunstone led Parrell, stopped there and held the lamp high over the freshly opened hole.

"Look, Parrell," Thunstone bade him. "That grave was opened from inside, not outside."

Parrell stooped and stared. One hand crept up and wiped the low, slanting brow.

"You're right, I guess," said Parrell slowly. "It looks like what a fox does when he breaks through at the end of his digging—the dirt's flung outward from below, only bigger'n a fox's hole." Parrell straightened up. His face was like sick tallow in the light of the lamp. "Then it's true, though it looks right pure down impossible. She was in there, alive, and she got out tonight."

"She got out the other two nights," said Thunstone. "I don't think I can explain to you exactly why, but night time was the time of her strength. And each time she came

here to you—walked or crept all the way. Each time, again, she could move no more when it was dawn."

"Lill came to me!"

"You loved her, didn't you? That's why she came to you."

PARRELL turned toward the house. "And she must have loved me," he whispered, "to come to me out of the grave. Tonight, she didn't have so far to go. If she'd stayed alive—"

Thunstone started back to the house. "Don't think about that, Parrell. She's certainly dead now, and what she would have done if she'd stayed alive isn't for us to think about."

Parrell made no reply until they had once more entered the front door and walked through to where Lill Warran lay as they had left her. In the light of the lamp Thunstone carried her face was clearly defined.

It was a calm face, a face at peace and a little sorrowful. Yes, a sweet face. Lill Warran may not have looked like that in life, or in life-in-death, but now she was completely dead, she was of a gentle, sleeping beauty. Thunstone could see how Parrell, or any other man, might love a face like that.

"And she came to me, she loved me," breathed Parrell again.

"Yes, she loved you," nodded Thunstone. "In her own way she did love you. Let's take her back to her grave."

Between them they carried her out and to the hole. At its bottom was the simple coffin of pine planks, its lid thrown outward and upward from its burst fastenings. Thunstone and Parrell put the body into the coffin, straightened its slack limbs, and lowered the lid. Parrell brought a spade and a shovel, and they filled and smoothed the grave.

"I'm going to say my little verse again," said Parrell. Standing with head bowed, he mumbled the lines:

"The raven crow is a coal, coal black,
The jay is a purple blue,
If ever I forget my own fair love,
Let my heart melt away like dew."

He looked up at Thunstone, tears streaming down his face. "Now she'll rest in peace."

"That's right. She'll rest in peace. She won't rise again."

"Listen, you mind going back to the house? I'll just watch here till morning. You don't think that'll hurt, do you?"

Thunstone smiled.

"No, it won't hurt. It will be perfectly all right. Because nothing whatever will disturb you."

"Or her," added Parrell.

"Or her," nodded Thunstone. "She won't be disturbed. Just keep remembering her as somebody who loved you, and whose rest will never be interrupted again."

Back in the house, Thunstone brought the lamp to the table where he had interrupted his letter to de Grandin. He took his pen and began writing again:

I was interrupted by events that brought this adventure to a good end.

And maybe I'll wait until I see you before I tell you that part of it.

But, to finish my earlier remarks:

If Lill Warran was a werewolf, and killed in her werewolf shape, it follows as a commonplace that she became a vampire after death. You can read as much in Montague Summers, as well as the work of your countryman, Cyprien Robert.

And as a vampire, she would and did return, in a vampire's travesty of affection, to the one living person whose heart still turned to her.

Because I half suspected all this from the moment I got wind of the story of Lill Warran, I brought with me the silver blade forged for just such battles by Saint Dunstan, and it was my weapon of victory.

He finished and folded the letter. Outside, the moon brightened the quiet night, in which it seemed no evil thing could possibly stir.

IS IT HUMAN OR INHUMAN? NATURAL OR SUPERNATURAL?
 WILL IT DESTROY US ALL?
THE THING
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September

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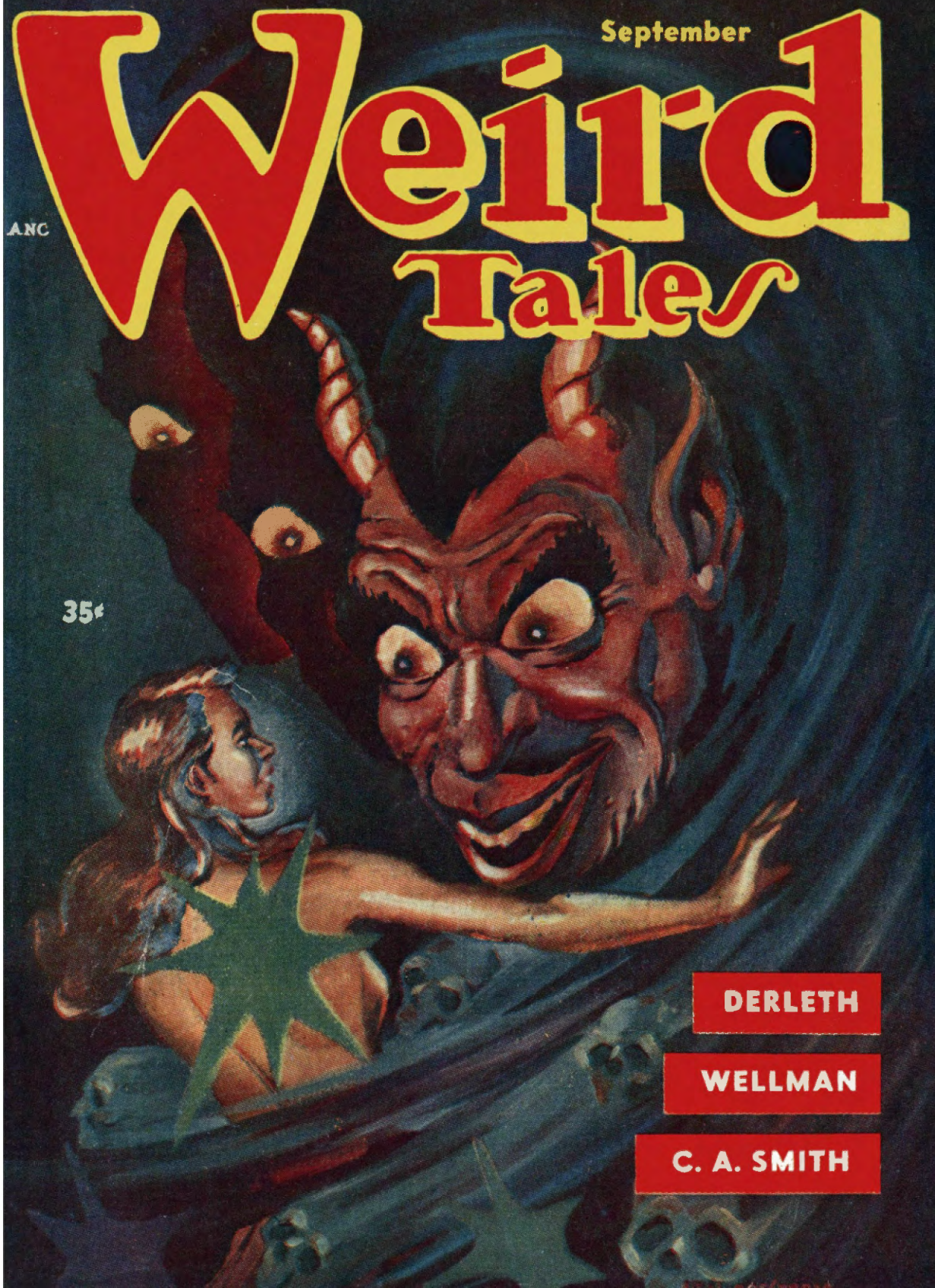
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C. A. SMITH

WEIRD TALES

September, 1953



PARTHENOPE

by Monly Wade Wellman



"... there were so many lies in the Odyssey!"

TO HIS brine-deadened ears came soft, clear music. Had he been able to think after swimming so long, with salt water dashing into his sagging mouth, with his arms turned to dull stone, he might have pondered that this was the singing

of death, a prelude to sleep under the waves of the Mediterranean.

But next instant he stirred, as though by another will, to a final effort. His hands, that had all but ceased flailing, framed once more a stroke-rhythm. His feet

Heading by W. H. Silvey

fluttered and kicked. His head came up out of the water, so that he saw what he had despaired of—a white beach with a face of dark rock behind, and at the blue water's edge a tall, waiting figure. The music rang its way into him, coursing through his blood like an elixir violently infused. He dared to bob upright, and solid bottom met his downward-groping toes. A few struggling strides, a scramble in foamy shallows, and he sprawled in the sand at the feet of the singer.

It was blessed to lie there, then it was painful. He made shift to gasp and pant, then to moan. Gentle laughter slid down from above, and a questing pressure came upon his sodden shoulder. With the last of his strength, he turned over upon his back.

She must have bent to touch him, but now she stood straight again. She towered, almost as tall as himself, with a figure both full and fine. Her garment was a plain dark drapery, so caught around her as to line out her strongly smooth curves from chin to ankle, leaving bare one round shoulder and one smooth, slender arm. Above this tilted her brown face, framed between winglike sweeps of black hair, with bright inky eyes under wise lids, a regally chiselled nose and full

red lips that smiled but did not part. She'd be lovely, he thought, if he were in any condition to appreciate loveliness.

"I was almost food for fishes," he muttered in Italian.

"No, you're too soaked in salt," she replied, and her speech was as musical as her song had been. "Not even a crab would eat you."

"Who are you?" he croaked, and sat up. "A siren?"

"*Seiren*," she repeated after him, in the Greek manner, as though to cheer him by falling in with the feeble pleasantry. And the rescued swimmer had recovered enough to look up at her with admiration. This was beauty, classic but living, and only a mannerless clod would sprawl at its feet.

He tried to rise, swaying, and she caught his arm to steady him. The quick grasp of her fingers was as strong as steel, and her nails dug into his water-sodden skin. He smiled thanks, trying to brush the drenched blond hair from his young face. He knew what a sorry sight he must be—naked except for his dripping white trousers, pallid and shrunken from his long immersion. But she smiled her slight smile—like the Mona Lisa, like the Empress Josephine—and asked his name and country.

"George Colby," he supplied. "I'm an American student. This

morning I was out in a fishing boat with some friends from Sicily. The boat sprang a leak, went down under us. Maybe they drowned. I just swam—kept swimming—got here—”

His head began to ring and whirl and, for all his efforts, he crumpled down to sit on the sand.

“You’re weak,” she said above his head. “Weak and famished. Wait.”

HE WAITED, in a sort of dreamy blur. Then an arm slid around his shoulders. She knelt to support him, and held to his mouth a sort of big plum.

“Eat,” she urged him.

He nibbled at the pulpy thing. The first bite refreshed him enormously, the sweet juice cleared his head like wine. “Eat,” she said again, turning the fruit against his hungry mouth, as a mother feeds a child.

After a moment, he could stand again. His shadow was long on the sand. The sun was sinking—he had been swimming most of the day.

“I don’t know how to reward you,” he said.

“I will be rewarded when I see you well and strong,” she made the gravest of answers.

“You’re being good,” he half babbled. “Now, may I impose further? May I go to a house,

will you help me there to spend the night? Tomorrow—”

“My house?” she echoed, as though the word and idea came strangely. “You mean, a place where men live. There is none on this beach.”

George Colby was far too weary and grateful to digest this amazing information. He only gazed into her steady black eyes.

“You may sleep on the sand,” she told him. “It’s soft and warm. I’ll keep watch.”

“Don’t bother,” he began to say, but she smiled compellingly. She put one hand on his shoulder, and with the other offered him a bunch of grapes.

“I don’t want to eat up your fruit,” he protested.

“I do not care for them. Eat.”

He did so, thankfully, sitting on the sand. She watched with a sort of happy relish as he devoured the grapes.

“Now sleep,” she directed as he cast away the stem. “Grow strong. Let the bitter salt seawater flow from your body.”

There was nothing he wanted to do more. He let her hands apply pressure, he stretched out on the sand. “Sleep,” she said. “Sleep.” Her musical voice was hypnosis.

He awakened once, shivering under a high-prowling moon. At once she was there, moving to sit beside him. Taking him in her

arms, she held him close to her. She handled his considerable weight as easily and gently as though he were a baby. Colby mumbled a sleepy protest, but she began to croon a song, a soft memory of the music that had seemed to draw him out of the sea. Now it comforted him, it weighed upon his eyelids. His face drooped against her soft, warm bosom, and he slept again.

He wakened to daylight, and a sensation as of stroking. Starting violently, he looked up into her serene black eyes. She was washing his body with palmfuls of fresh water. Her tight lips smiled.

"I did not want to clean away the salt when it was dark and cold," she said. "But now you are better. Your flesh was ridged by the brine, and I have washed it away. Are you hungry?"

He was, and got up. He moved easily after the night's rest. His rescuer offered him a new fruit, that had a thick, thorny rind.

"Aren't you going to have breakfast?" he asked her.

"Later," she said, and watched while he peeled the fruit. Its flesh was firm, like a yam, but more delicate in texture. As he bit into it, she offered a great fluted sea shell, full of fresh water.

Now the sun had risen, and

Colby could be aware, for the first time, of the place where he had come to land.

IT WAS not an island, really; rather a reef or a bar, with a tall central spire of rock, like a monolithic dolman reared with determined toil by some ancient cult. The sandy beach that surrounded this fragment was no larger than a ballroom floor, and almost as smooth and flat. Several small trees grew, in a scrubby clump, at one side of the stone pillar, and there were a few wisps of grass. Colby could see no house, nor any trees or vines that might have produced the fruit he had eaten.

"Don't tell me you live here alone," he cried protestingly.

"I've always lived here," she assured him. "Always." And her eyes looked at him critically. "Do you feel well? Healthy?"

"Perfect, thank you." He walked toward the foot of the rocky pillar. It towered above him like a gigantic domino set on end. Colby studied its substance. It defied what little he knew of geology—smooth and gray as whetstone, with dark veins that looked metallic. And there were cracks—no, carved lines, an inscription. Slowly he pondered the letters in his head, translating them in his classroom Greek. They spelled a word. Yes.

Parthenope.

"It is my name," murmured her voice at his shoulder.

"I've heard it before," said Colby, without turning. It's lovely—strange. Wait, I remember. Wasn't it the name of somebody in the Odyssey? Didn't Odysseus say—"

"Oh," she said gently, "Odysseus lied about so much. He said that, when he escaped me, I jumped into the sea and was drowned."

"Parthenope," Colby said again. "She was one of the three sisters, the—"

"My sisters perished, long ago. But I have stayed."

He turned and stared, wondering what joke she made. But she

did not smile. She stood straight and tense inside her loose robe.

Her right arm crept toward him, the fingers crooked like talons.

"My song drew you," she said. "Odysseus got away, but you came. You were too ill and faint when you reached the shore. But now the salt is drained out of your flesh and blood, and it is sweet."

Colby drew back against the rock as she closed in on him.

"Who are you?" he screamed.

Her lips parted in a smile, and at last he saw her teeth, narrow and keen and widely spaced, the teeth of a flesh-eater.

"I am a *seiren*," she told him again.



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Odd, how some places have an evil reputation . . .

Nobody Ever Goes There

by Manly Wade Wellman

With this new story of John the ballad-singer, we are pleased to welcome back to our pages one of *Weird Tales*' most legendary discoveries. Fifty-four years ago, this magazine published Mr. Wellman's first tale, "Back to the Beast," and since then, under his own name or that of his pseudonym, 'Gans T. Field,' his chilling tales have adorned no fewer than fifty-three issues. For all his years, Mr. Wellman is hale and hearty and still, happily, writing tales as chilling as ever.

That was what Mark Banion's grandparents told him when he was a five-year-old with tousled black hair, looking from the porch and out across Catch River to a big dark building and some small dark

ones clumped against the soaring face of Music Mountain, rank with its gloomy huddles of trees.

His grandparents towered high to tell him, the way grownups do when you're little, and they said, "Nobody ever goes there," without explaining, the way grownups do when you're little. Mark was a good, obedient boy. He didn't press the matter. And he sure enough didn't go over.

The town had been named Trimble for somebody who, a hundred and forty-odd years ago, had a stock stand there, entertainment for man and beast. In those old days, stagecoaches and trading wagons rolled along the road chopped through the mountains, and sometimes came great herds of cattle and horses and hogs. Later there had been the railroad that carried hardly anything anymore. Trucks rumbled along Main Street and on, northwest to Tennessee or southeast to Asheville. Trimble was no great size for a town. Maybe that was why it stayed interesting to look at. It had stores on Main Street, and Mark's grandfather's chair factory, the town hall and the *Weekly Record*. On side streets stood the bank, the high school where students came by bus from all corners of the rocky county, and three churches. All those things were on this side of Catch River.

But over yonder where nobody went, loomed the empty-windowed old textile mill, like the picture of a ruined castle in an outlawed romantic novel. Once it had spun its acres of cloth. People working there had lived in the little house you could barely see from this side. Those houses had a dusky, secret look, bunched against Music Mountain. When

Mark asked why it was called Music Mountain, his grandparents said, "We never heard tell why." So once, in his bed at night, Mark thought he heard soft music from across Catch River to his window. When he mentioned that next day, they laughed and said he was making it up.

He stopped talking about that other side of the river, but he kept his curiosity as he grew older. He found out a few things from listening to talk when he played in town. He found out that a police car did cruise over there two or three times a week on the rattly old bridge that nobody else used, and that the cruise was made only by daylight. When he was in high school, tall and tanned and a hot-rock tight end on the football team, he and two classmates started to amble across one Saturday. They were nearly halfway to the other side when a policeman came puffing after them and scolded them back. That night, Mark's grandparents told him never to let them hear of doing such a fool thing again. He asked why it was foolish, and his grandmother said, "Nobody ever goes there. Ever." And shut up her mouth with a snap.

One who did tell Mark something about it was Mr. Glover Shelton, the oldest man in Trimble, who whittled birds and bear cubs and rabbits in his little shop behind the Worley Cafe. Once a month he sold a crate of such whittlings to a man who carried them to a tourist bazaar off in another county. Mr. Glover was lamed so that he had an elbow in one knee, like a cricket. He wore checked shirts and bib overalls and a pointed beard as white as dandelion fluff. And he had memories.

"Something other happened there round about seventy-five years back," he said. "I was another sight younger than you then. There was the textile mill, and thirty-forty folks a-living in them company houses and a-working two shifts. Then one day, they was all of a sudden all gone."

"Gone where?" Mark asked him.

"Don't rightly know how to answer that. Just gone. Derwood Neidger the manager, and Sam Brood the foreman, and the whole crew on shift—gone." Mr. Glover whittled at the bluejay he was making. "One night just round sundown, the whistle it blowed and blowed, and folks over here got curiosed up and next day some of 'em headed over across the bridge. And nair soul at the mill, nor neither yet in the houses. The wives and children done gone, too. Everbody."

"Are you putting me on, Mr. Glover?"

"You done asked me, boy, and I done told you the thing I recollect about it."

"They just packed up and left?"

"They left, but they sure God nair packed up. The looms was still a-running. Derwood Neidger's fifty-dollar hat was on the hook, his cigar burnt out in a tray on his desk. Even supper a-standing on the stoves, two-three places. But nair a soul to be seen anywheres."

Mark looked to see if a grin was caught in the white beard, but Mr. Glover was as solemn as a preacher. "Where did they go?" Mark asked.

"I just wish you'd tell me. There was a search made, inquiries here and yonder, but none of them folks air showed theirself again."

"And now," said Mark, "nobody ever goes there."

"Well now, a couple-three has gone, one time another . . . from here, and a hunter or so a-cooning over Music Mountain from the far side. But none air come back no more. Only them policemen that drives over quick and comes back quick—always by daylight, always three in the car, with pistols and sawed-off shotguns. Boy," said Mr. Glover, "folks just stays off from that there place, like a-staying off from a rocky patch full of snakes, a wet bottom full of chills and fever."

"And now it's a habit," said Mark. "Staying out."

"Likewise a habit not to go a-talking about it none. Don't you go a-naming it to nobody I told you this much."

Mark played good enough football to get a grant in aid at a lowland college, about enough help to make the difference between going and not going. Summers, he mostly worked hard to keep in condition, in construction and at road mending. By the time he graduated, his grandparents had sold the chair factory and had retired to Florida. Mark came back to Trimble, where they hired him to coach football and baseball and teach physical education at his old high school.

And still nobody ever went across Catch River. He felt the old interest, but he quickly became more interested in Ruth Covell, the history teacher.

She was small and slim, and her hair was blonde with a spice of red to it. She wore it more or less the length Mark wore his own black mane. She

came up to about his coat lapel. Her face was round and sweet. She gave him a date, but wanted to sit and talk on the porch of the teacherage instead of driving to an outdoor movie. It was a balmy October night. She fetched them out two glasses of iced tea, flavored with lemon juice and ginger. They sat on bark-bottomed chairs, and Ruth said it was good to be in Trimble.

"I've liked it here from the first," she said, "I've thought I might write a history of this town."

"A history of Trimble?" Mark repeated, smiling. "Who'd read that?"

"You might, when I finish it. This place has stories worth putting on record. I've been to the town hall and the churches. I've found out lots of interesting things, but one thing avoids me."

"What's that, Ruth?" Mark asked, sipping.

"Why nobody ever goes across the river, and why everybody changes the subject when I bring it up."

From where they sat they could see a spattery shimmer of moonlight on the water, but Music Mountain beyond was as black as soot.

"Ruth," Mark said, "you're up against a story that just never is told in Trimble."

"But why not?" Her face hung silvery in the moonglow.

"I don't know. I never found out, and I was born here. Old Mr. Glover Shelton told me a few things, but he's dead now." He related the old man's story. "I'm unable to tell you why things are that way about the business," he wound up. "It's just not discussed, sort of the way sex didn't used to be discussed in polite society. I suspect that most peo-

ple have more or less forgotten about it, pushed it to the back of their minds."

"But the police go over," she reminded him. "The chief said it was just a routine check, a tour in a deserted area. Then he changed the subject, too."

"If I were you, I'd not push anyone too hard about all this," said Mark. "It's a sort of rule of life here, staying on this side of the river. As an athletic coach, I abide by rules."

"As a historian, I look for the truth," she said back, "and I don't like to have the truth denied me."

He changed the subject. They talked cheerfully of other things. When he left that night, she let him kiss her and said he could come back and see her again.

Next Saturday evening, Ruth finished grading a sheaf of papers and just before sundown she walked out in the town with Mark. She wore snug jeans and a short, dark jacket. They had a soda at Doc Roberts's drug store and strolled on along Main Street. Mark told her about his boyhood in Trimble, pointed out the massive old town hall (twice burned down, once by accident, and rebuilt both times inside its solid brick walls), and led her behind Worley's Cafe to show her where Glover Shelton once had worked. The door of the little old shop was open. A light gleamed through it, and a voice from inside said, "Hidy."

A man sat at the ancient work bench, dressed in a blue hickory shirt and khaki pants and plow shoes, carefully shaping a slip of wood with a

bright, sharp knife. He was lean, and as tall as Mark, say six feet. His long, thoughtful face was neither young nor old. In his dark hair showed silver dabs at the temples and in a brushed-back lock on top.

"Glover Shelton and I were choice friends, years back," he said. "I knew the special kinds of wood he hunted out and used here, and his nephew loaned me a key so I could come work me out a new bridge for my old guitar."

It was an old guitar indeed, seasoned as dark brown as a nut. The man set the new bridge in place, with a dab of some adhesive compound. "That'll dry right while we're a-studying it," he said. Then he laid the strings across, threaded them through the pegs, and tightened them with judicious fingers. He struck a chord, adjusted the pegs, struck and struck again. "Sounds passable," he decided.

"Those strings shine like silver," offered Ruth.

"It just so happens that silver's what they are," was the reply, with a quiet smile. "Silver's what the oldest old-timers used. Might could be I'm the last that uses it."

He achieved a chord to suit him. Tunefully, richly, he sang:

"She came down the stair,
Combing back her yellow hair,
And her cheek was as red as the rose . . ."

Mark had made up his mind to something.

"Sir," he said, "I knew Mr. Glover Shelton when I was a boy. This young lady wishes he had lived

for her to talk to. Because he was the only man I ever heard speak of the far side of Catch River yonder, the Music Mountain side."

"I know a tad of something about that," said the guitar-picker, while the strings whispered under his long, skilled fingers. "An old Indian medicine man, name of Reuben Manco—he mentioned about it to me one time."

"Nobody here in Trimble talks about it," said Mark. "They just stay away from over there. Nobody ever goes there."

"I reckon not, son. The way Reuben Manco had it, the old Indians more or less left the place alone, too. What was there didn't relish to be pestered."

"Some other kind of men than Indians?" suggested Ruth.

"Better just only call them things. The way the old story comes down, they didn't truly look like aught a man could tell of at first. And they more or less learnt from a-studying men—Indians—how to get a little bitty bit like men, too."

"They sound weird," said Mark, interested.

"I reckon that's a good word for them. The Indians were scared of how they made themselves to look. So sometimes the Indians got up on the top of the mountain yonder and sang to the things, to make sure they wouldn't try to come out and make trouble." The long, thoughtful face brooded above the guitar's soft melody. "I reckon that's how it come to be named Music Mountain. The Indians would sing those things back off and into their place, time after time. I reckon all the way up to when the white men came in."

"Came in and took the Indian's land," said Mark. "That happened here."

"Shoo, it happened all over America—the taking of the land. All right, I've given you what Reuben Manco gave me. Music Mountain for the music the Indians used against those things."

"Why won't anybody in town tell about this?" Ruth asked.

"I don't reckon folks in town much heard of it. Especially when they might not want to hear tell of it."

"I'm glad to hear it," declared Ruth. "I'm someone who wants to know things."

"There's always a right much to get to know, ma'am," was the polite rejoinder.

Mark sat down on the work bench. "Music," he repeated. "Could the Indians control something like that—something frightening, you said—with music?"

"Well, son, with Indians the right song can make the rain to fall. An Indian hunter sings to bring him luck before he goes after game. Medicine sing to cure a sick man or a hurt man. One time another, music's been known to do the like of such things."

Mark asked for the story of the mill that had been built under Music Mountain. It seemed that Derwood Neideger had interested some Northern financiers and had built his mill, with Trimble's townspeople shaking their heads about it. But there was good pay, and families came from other places to live in the houses built for them and to spin the cloth. Until the night they all vanished.

"What if there had been music at the mill?" Mark wondered. "In the houses?"

"Doesn't seem like as if there was much of that, so we can't rightly tell. And it's too late to figure on it now."

The sun sank over the western mountains. Dusk slid swiftly down into the town. Mark listened as his companion struck the silver strings and sang again:

"She came down the stair;
Combing back her yellow hair . . ."

He muted the melody with his palm. "Sounds like that beauty-looking young girl that came here with you. Where's she gone off to?"

Mark jumped up from where he sat. Ruth was nowhere in sight. He hurried out of the shop, around the cafe and out into the street.

"Ruth, wait—"

Far along the sidewalk, in the light of a shop window, he saw her as she turned off and out of view, where the old alley led to where the bridge was.

"Wait!" he yelled after her, and started to run.

It was a long sprint to the alley. One or two loungers gazed at Mark as he raced past. He found the alley, headed into it, stumbled in its darkness and went to one knee. He felt his trousers rip where they struck the jagged old cobbles. Up again, he hurried to the bridge.

It was already too dim to see clearly, but Ruth must be there. She must be moving along, almost as fast as he. "You damned fool," he wheezed into

the darkening air as he ran. "You damned little fool, why did you do this?" And in his heart her voice seemed to answer him, *I'm someone who wants to know things.*

The old, old boards of the bridge rattled under his feet. He heard the soft, purling rush of Catch River. There she was now, at the far end, a darker point in the night that came down on them. "Ruth," he tried to call her once more, but his breath wasn't enough to carry it. He ran on after her.

Now he had come out on the other bank, where nobody ever went. He turned to his left. A road of sorts had been there once, it seemed. Its blotchy stones were rank between with grass. His shoe skidded on what must have been slippery moss and he nearly went down again. To his right climbed the steep face of Music Mountain, huddled with watching trees as black as ink. On ahead of him, small, dark houses clung together at the roadside. Farther beyond them rose the sooty pile of the old mill. He stood for a moment and wheezed to get his breath. Something came toward him. He quivered as he faced it.

"I knew you'd come too, Mark," said Ruth's merry voice.

At that moment, the moon had scrambled clear of the mountain and flung pale light around them. He saw that Ruth smiled.

"Why ever did you—" he began to say.

"I told you, Mark, I want to find things out. Nobody else here wants to. Dares to."

"You come right back to town with me," he commanded.

She laughed musically.

On into the sky swam the round, pallid moon, among a bright sprinkling of stars. Its light picked out the mill more clearly. It struck a twinkle from the glass of a window; or could there be a stealthy light inside? Ruth laughed again.

"But you came across, at least," she said, as though happy about it.

The glow of the moon beat upon her, making her hair pale. And something else moved on the road to the mill.

He hurried toward Ruth as the something drifted from between those dubious houses, a murky series of puffs, like foul smoke. He thought, for a moment hoped, that it might be fog; but it gathered into shapes as it emerged, shadowy, knobby shapes. Headlike lumps seemed to rise, narrow at the top, with, Mark thought, great loose mouths. Wisps stirred like groping arms.

"Let's get out of here," he said to Ruth, and tried to catch her by the hand.

But then she, too, saw those half-shaped things that now stole into groups and advanced. She screamed once, like an animal caught in a trap, and she lost her head and ran from them. She ran toward the mill in the moonlight that flooded the old paving stones.

Mark rushed after her because he must, because she had to be caught and hustled back toward the bridge. As the two of them fled, the creatures from among the houses slunk, stole after them, made a line across the road, cut off escape in that direction.

Ruth ran fast in her unreasoning terror, toward where a great squat doorway gaped in the old mill. But then she stopped, so suddenly that Mark nearly blundered against her as he hurried from behind.

"More—" she whimpered. "More of them—"

And more of them crept out through that door. Many more of them, crowding together into a grotesque phalanx.

Ruth pressed close against Mark. She trembled, sagged, her pert daring was gone from her. He gathered his football muscles for a fight, whatever fight he could put up. They came closing in around him and Ruth, those shapes that were only half-shapes. They churned wispily as they formed themselves into a ring.

He made out squat bodies, knobs of craniums, the green gleam of eyes, not all of the eyes set two and two. The Indians, those old Indians, had been right to fear presences like these. Everything drew near. Above the encircling, approaching horde, Mark saw things that fluttered in the air. Bats? But bats are never that big. He heard a soft mutter of sound, as of panting breath.

Even if Ruth hadn't been there to hold on her feet, Mark could never have run now. The way was cut off. It would have to be a battle. What kind of battle?

Just then, abrupt music rang out in the shining night.

And that was a brave music, a flooding burst of melody, like harps in the hands of minstrels. A powerful, tuneful voice sang words to it:

"The cross in my right hand,
That I may travel open land,
That I may be charmed and blessed,
And safe from any man or beast . . ."

The pressing throng ceased to press around Mark and Ruth. It ebbed away, like dark water flowing back from an island.

The song changed, the guitar and the voice changed:

"Lights in the valley outshine the sun,
Lights in the valley outshine the sun,
Lights in the valley outshine the sun—
Look away beyond the blue."

Those creatures, if they could be called creatures, fell back. They fell back, as though blown by the wind. The singing voice put in words of its own, put in a message, a guidance:

"Head for the bridge and I'll follow you,
Head for the bridge and I'll follow you,
Head for the bridge and I'll follow you—
Look away beyond the blue."

Ruth would have run again. Mark held her tightly by the arm, kept her to a walk. Running just now might start something else running. They stumbled back along the rough stones with the grass between the edges. The moonlight blazed upon them. Behind them, like a prayer, another verse of the song:

"Do, Lord, oh do, Lord, oh do remember me,

Do, Lord, oh do, Lord, oh do remember me,
Do, Lord, oh do, Lord, oh do remember me—
Look away beyond the blue."

But this time, a confident happiness in that appeal. Mark felt like joining in and singing the song himself, but he kept silent and urged Ruth along by her arm. He thought, though he could not be sure, that soft radiances blinked on and off in the shantylike old houses strung along the road. He did not stop to look more closely. He peered ahead for the bridge, and then the bridge was there and thankfully they were upon it, their feet drumming the planks.

Still he panted for breath, as they reached the other side. He held Ruth to him, glad that he could hold her, glad for her that he was there to hold her. He looked across. There on the bridge came something dark. It was the guitar-picker, moving at a slower pace than Mark and Ruth had moved. He sang, softly now, softly. Mark could not make out the song. He came and joined them at last. He stood tall and lean with his hair rumpled, holding his guitar across himself like a rifle at the port.

"You all can be easy now," he said gently. "Looky yonder, they can't come over this far."

Over there, all the way over there at the far bridge head, a dark cluster of forms showed under the moon, standing close together and not coming.

"The fact about it is," said the guitar-picker, "they don't seem to be up to making their way across a run of water."

Mark was able to speak. "Like *Dracula*," he said numbly. "Like the witches in *Tam O'Shanter*."

"Sure enough, like them. Now, folks," and the voice was gentler than ever, "you all see they'd best be left alone on their side yonder, the way folks have mostly left them alone, all the way back to when the whole crew of the mill went off to nowhere. Old ways can be best."

"Mark, I was such a fool," Ruth mumbled against Mark's shirt.

"I told you that, dear," he said to her.

"Did you call me dear?"

"Yes."

"It makes me feel right good to hear talk like that with nice young folks like you two," said the guitar-picker.

Mark looked up above Ruth's trembling golden head. "You were able to defeat them," he said. "You knew music would hold them back."

"No, I nair rightly knew that." The big hand swept a melody from the silver string. "I hoped it, was all, and the hope wasn't vain."

Mark held out a shaking hand. "We'll never be able to thank you, Mr.—I don't even know your name."

My name's John."

"John what?" Mark asked.

"Just call me John."



Manly Wade Wellman